

A 'TWO-FISTED, THREE-PARTY STATE':

UTAH'S 1992 U.S. SENATE RACE

by

Carl Jonathan Cox

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
The University of Utah  
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

The University of Utah

August 2011

Copyright © Carl Jonathan Cox 2011

All Rights Reserved

# **The University of Utah Graduate School**

## **STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL**

The thesis of **Carl Jonathan Cox**  
has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

<u><b>Robert A. Goldberg</b></u>	, Chair	<u><b>06/10/2011</b></u> Date Approved
----------------------------------	---------	---

<u><b>W. Paul Reeve</b></u>	, Member	<u><b>06/10/2011</b></u> Date Approved
-----------------------------	----------	---

<u><b>Eric Hinderaker</b></u>	, Member	<u><b>06/10/2011</b></u> Date Approved
-------------------------------	----------	---

and by **James Lehning**, Chair of  
the Department of **History**

and by Charles A. Wight, Dean of The Graduate School.

## ABSTRACT

In the 1992 United States Senate election, Utah continued its strong trend toward conservatism. Since the 1960s, Utahns identified themselves predominantly with the Republican Party. This ideological transformation occurred in conjunction with a significant population shift from urban areas to suburban communities, growing conservative strongholds in Utah politics. Traditional urban versus rural tension continued, but a decrease in rural residents limited its importance, particularly in general elections. With Utahns joining the conservative movement in large numbers, Republican Bob Bennett, a candidate with no previous elected experience, easily defeated four-term Democratic Congressman Wayne Owens in the 1992 U.S. Senate election. The most competitive contest in this race occurred in the Republican primary rather than the general election, a trend demonstrating the increasingly conservative nature of the state.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were key to potential change. They constituted two-thirds of the state's population in 1992. These were the rank and file of the conservative movement in the state. As Mormons turned to social conservatives and settled into homogenous suburbs, Republicans gained an electoral advantage that proved almost insurmountable for Democrats.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
BEEHIVE OF CONSERVATISM.....	1
THIS IS THE “RIGHT” PLACE.....	6
THREE MILLIONAIRES AND A CONGRESSMAN.....	10
DELEGATES: UTAH’S POLITICAL ELITES.....	13
THE PUSH TO SEVENTY PERCENT.....	19
PRIMARY: BATTLEGROUND OF CONSERVATISM.....	28
A DEMOCRAT’S LAST STAND.....	48
RISE OF CONSERVATISM AND FALL OF LIBERALISM.....	62
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	67

## BEEHIVE OF CONSERVATISM

In the 1992 presidential election, Democrat Bill Clinton finished in third place only in Utah. Both Republican George H.W. Bush and third-party candidate Ross Perot bested the eventual winner there. Such a poor showing—less than 24 percent of Utah’s popular vote—led observers to expect an electoral bloodbath for other Democrats in the state. In part, that prediction came true. Democratic gubernatorial candidate Stewart Hansen fared worse than Clinton, winning just 23 percent of the vote while also finishing third. However in the same election cycle, Democrats won two of Utah’s three congressional seats, and Democrat Jan Graham was elected attorney general in the party’s only statewide victory.<sup>1</sup>

Unique circumstances influenced each of these Democratic victories. Bill Orton’s re-election in the overwhelmingly conservative Third Congressional District surprised experts. A weak challenger and his own conservative voting record propelled Democrat Orton to victory. Democrat Karen Shepherd outlasted Republican Enid Greene in the more moderate Second Congressional District. As the state’s solicitor general, Jan Graham held significantly higher name recognition than her 34-year old opponent Scott Burns in the attorney general’s race. Republican Burns’ only experience came from his time as a rural prosecutor in southern Utah. He attempted to bring rural voters to his candidacy only to alienate many urban and suburban voters in the process. While she

---

<sup>1</sup> Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1992 General Election Results*, (Salt Lake City, 1992). Republican George H.W. Bush won the state with 41 percent of the vote followed by Independent Ross Perot with 26 percent and Democrat Bill Clinton with 24 percent.

won the race by only 5,000 votes, Graham's margin of victory in densely populated Salt Lake County was 46,000. In a race less concerned with ideology than legal experience, Graham outpaced Burns to become the last Democrat to win statewide office in Utah. Despite such Democratic gains, the state remained firmly in GOP control with Republican Governor Mike Leavitt easily defeating Democrat Stewart Hansen and Republicans nearly doubling their Democratic colleagues in the state legislature.<sup>2</sup>

Dissecting the long-term political implications of the 1992 elections is difficult amid such electoral variance. Yet, if the results in 1992 were diverse, a pattern emerges that reflects the long-term shift of the state to the political right. While each election cycle of the late twentieth century saw conservatism strengthen in Utah, Democrats were still competitive for state and federal office. In 1992, Utah Democrats fielded their party's strongest candidate in an open U.S. Senate race only to see him soundly trounced. The crushing, 16 percent defeat of four-term Representative Wayne Owens in a highly anticipated contest signaled the final stage of Democratic viability in U.S. Senate races. Since that contest, Republicans have easily won every Senate election in the state by an average of 30 percent over their Democratic challengers. A study of this Democratic last stand offers insight not only into the rise of conservatism but the fall of liberalism in Utah. Here also is apparent the interplay of local and national events along with the importance of style and political image in effecting outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1992 General Election Results*, (Salt Lake City, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1992 General Election Results*. The terms of Owens were non-continuous, 1973-75 and 1987-93.

In 1963, a *New York Times* article called Texas a “Two-Fisted, Three-Party State.”<sup>4</sup> Widely considered to be a one-party state, the article showed the dominant Democratic Party split between competing liberal and moderate factions. Each competed for control of government with the Republican Party playing a minority role in state politics. Such a title could be appropriated for Utah in the late twentieth century. Democrats stood in a marginal position in state politics as the two larger factions of the Grand Old Party (GOP) fought over who controlled the party and ultimately state government and federal office. The 1992 Senate primary vote illustrated this. With a primary record 49 percent of the state’s registered voters casting ballots, Republican candidates Bob Bennett and Joe Cannon received 135,514 and 128,125 votes respectively. The Democratic primary was hotly contested, yet its two candidates only received a combined 120,746 votes, less than either GOP challenger. Republican conservative contenders wielded two fists in the state’s political system. The Democratic Party contributed to the political environment, but it played a tertiary role to these two factions of conservatism.

Discussions of Utah politics inevitably concern the Mormon religion, Utah’s predominant faith. With 59 percent of its members identifying themselves as conservatives, the Mormon Church outpaces other religious groups in the state and country with its conservatism. By comparison, only eight percent of Mormons self-identify as liberals. The four major candidates in 1992, Joe Cannon, Bob Bennett, Doug Anderson, and Wayne Owens were active members of the Mormon Church. Of the four, Owens had held the highest-ranking position in the church hierarchy, spending three

---

<sup>4</sup> Ronnie Dugger, “Texas: Two-Fisted, Three-Party State,” *New York Times*, 3 November 1963, SM13.



years as a mission president in Canada between elections to the House of Representatives. Yet because of his political affiliation as a Democrat, Owens continually faced questions about his Mormon faith. A 1974 poll revealed that 70 percent of Utahns thought he belonged to another church. The religious divide is palpable in Utah society and politics. Few issues escape religious identity and meaning. Voters weigh candidates not only by their messages but with a sensitivity to religious affiliation and level of commitment.<sup>5</sup>

With this as background, the 1992 U.S. Senate race emerges as a valuable case study to assess political trends in Utah. Going beyond newspapers and other public sources, this thesis examines campaign materials, particularly those of Bob Bennett's staff, still unavailable to researchers. Supplementary to this are interviews with several key players in that election. Government records, including census reports, illuminate important demographic shifts in Utah that shaped political change. Utilizing internal memos and strategic documents from Bennett's personal collection, we get an insider's glimpse of the workings of a statewide political campaign.

Building on these primary and secondary sources, this thesis seeks to consider the 1992 Senate race in the context of demographic change and a growing conservative movement. Key to this analysis is the political career of Wayne Owens. The transformation of the political environment can be measured in Owens' runs for the

---

<sup>5</sup> Frank Newport, "Mormons Most Conservative Major Religious Group in U.S." *Gallup Poll* (11 January 2010). Accessed 23 February 2011; John Sillito and Bill Slaughter, "An Interview with Wayne Owens." *Sunstone* 5, no. 4 (July 1980), 59. Owens won election to the House of Representatives in 1972 but vacated this office to run for an open seat in 1974 against Republican Jake Garn. After losing that election, the Mormon Church asked him to oversee its missionary program in Montreal, Canada from 1975 to 1978. In 1986, he won another election to the House of Representatives from the same district.

Senate in 1974 and 1992 which bookend the period. His failures put into bold relief the success of Republicans and conservatives in the Beehive state.

## THIS IS THE “RIGHT” PLACE

Throughout much of the twentieth century, Utah followed national political trends. Between 1916 and 1972, Utah voters supported the eventual presidential winner in 15 of 16 elections. Despite this apparent shadowing of national politics, Utah’s political dial began turning to the right during the latter half of the twentieth century. The last time a Democrat outperformed the national popular vote was Harry Truman in 1948 when Utah delivered him a nine percent victory, doubling the national average. Since that time, Utah has always voted more conservatively than the national average in its presidential elections. Even in the 1964 election when Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson defeated Republican Barry Goldwater, the state delivered a 13 percent smaller margin of victory for Johnson. Figure 1 shows the difference in popular vote between the national average and Utah. With a few aberrations, the results demonstrate a state growing further apart politically from the rest of the nation.

A series of master’s theses have surveyed social and political change in Utah since the 1960s. James Seaman’s important study of twentieth-century Utah politics, “Critical Campaign: Republicans, Democrats and the 1964 Election in Utah,” examines Johnson’s successful presidential campaign. No Democratic candidate has won 40 percent of the popular vote in the state since his victory. Despite growing concerns with the national Democratic agenda, Seaman attributes Johnson’s win to the power of

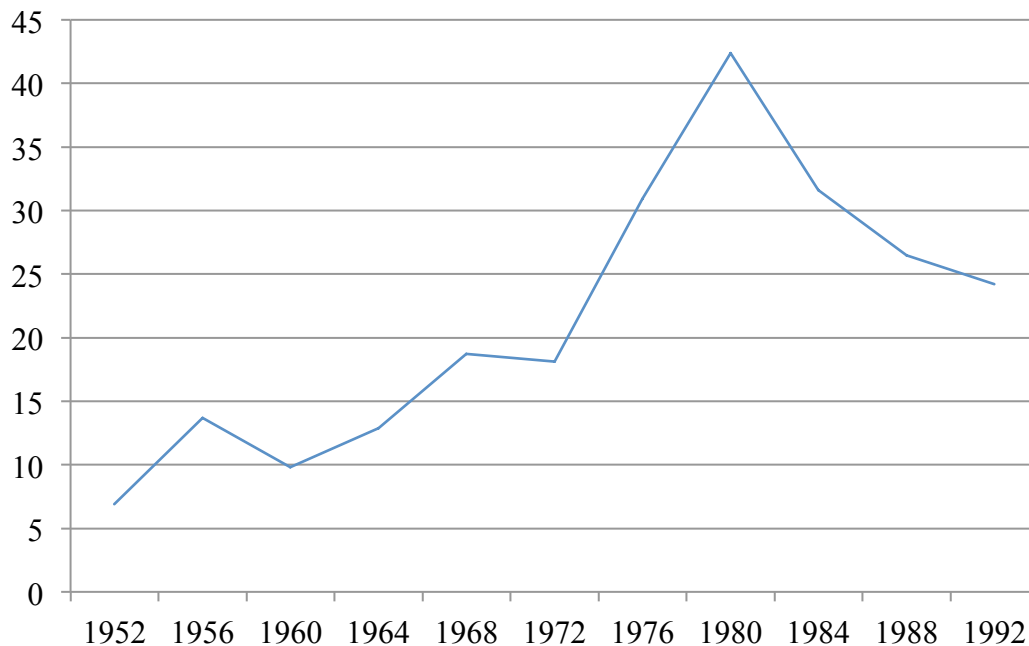


Figure 1. Utah Presidential Vote Compared to National Average  
(Percent More Republican)

personality, particularly through a close relationship with Mormon President David O. McKay. If Democratic candidates wanted to win in Utah, their best hope was to follow Johnson's example, overcoming party differences with personality. More importantly, a Democrat could win if voters felt the Republican opponent was outside the mainstream, as many viewed Barry Goldwater in 1964. Jay Rogers' thesis "Utah's Right Turn, Republican Ascendancy and the 1976 U.S. Senate Race," examines this watershed election cycle as incumbent Democrat Frank Moss suffered defeat to Republican Orrin Hatch. No Democrat has won the office since. Both theses document the decline of Utah's Democratic Party.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jay Logan Rogers, "Utah's Right Turn: Republican Ascendancy and the 1976 U.S. Senate Race" (Master's thesis, University of Utah, 2008); James Seaman, "Critical Campaign: Republicans, Democrats and the 1964 Election in Utah" (Master's thesis, University of Utah, 2007).

Explaining Utah's growing political conservatism brings multiple factors into play. An event that significantly changed the state's political outlook occurred during the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Following the 1973 Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* decision, the issue of abortion became a litmus test for many conservative voters. Given Utah's strong religious atmosphere, the issue took on great weight among voters. Candidates rarely mentioned abortion in the 1992 U.S. Senate race because all of them, Democrats and Republicans, adopted a pro-life stance.<sup>2</sup>

Gay activism also gave conservatives additional momentum. Charles Perry's thesis, "Let He Who Is Without Sin Cast the First Orange," examines the movement in Salt Lake City, Utah. While small and isolated, these activists alarmed enough Utahns to help create a backlash of conservatism among voters. Kelley Page Heuston's thesis, "Homosexuality and the Fight for Legal Rights in Utah" analyzes the movement's legislative and legal battles in a hostile environment. As states across the country passed hate crimes legislation, Utah lawmakers adopted a bill in 1992 that focused on religion and race while conspicuously ignoring homosexuality.<sup>3</sup>

While other intermountain states have shifted back into competitive two-party systems, conservatives continue to dominate Utah politics. Historian Dean May in his 1987 study *Utah: A People's History* offered a broader perspective. While conceding a major shift toward conservatism in the 1970s and 1980s, May questioned the permanence of this move to the right. None of these studies has attempted to correlate ideological

---

<sup>2</sup> For additional information on the cultural revolution see: Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*, (New York: The Free Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Perry, "Let He Who Is Without Sin Cast the First Orange: Anita Bryant and the Making of a Gay Rights Movement in Salt Lake City" (Master's thesis, University of Utah, 2008); Kelley Page Heuston, "Homosexuality and the Fight for Legal Rights in Utah" (Master's thesis, University of Utah, 2005), 17.

change with demographic analysis and thus measure the grassroots nature of conservative power.<sup>4</sup>

Two Brigham Young University political science professors, David Magleby and H.E. “Bud” Scruggs, conducted the only significant research on Utah’s 1992 election. Their groundbreaking study focused entirely on the caucus-convention system, a process often ignored when discussing Utah political history. They compiled data on caucus attendees and delegates, giving important insights into candidates’ convention strategies. This thesis expands on their findings to include analysis of the primary and general elections. The diverse sources available to the author construct a much sharper picture of the 1992 election and allow it to be seen in broader ideological and demographic contexts.

---

<sup>4</sup> Dean L. May, *Utah: A People’s History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 191.

### THREE MILLIONAIRES AND A CONGRESSMAN

U.S. Senator Jake Garn shocked many political insiders when he chose not to run for reelection in 1992. Most aspiring candidates had turned their attention to the open gubernatorial contest, but with a rare Senate seat now open, many flocked to the race. Geneva Steel CEO Joe Cannon became the first GOP candidate to declare his candidacy. Others, including business executive Bob Bennett, soon joined the contest.<sup>1</sup>

Many voters recognized Cannon's name because of his reputation for business success. When the state's major steel plant threatened to shut down, Cannon had orchestrated an unexpected takeover. With more than a thousand Utahns employed at the plant, the resurrected steel company drew state and national praise. Just as important, Cannon connected himself to the Utah political establishment with hefty campaign contributions. In 1990, he donated more money to political candidates than any person in the state, a move clearly designed to curry favor for his business from governmental elites. It also positioned him for a political run. Cannon rode his business success into the role of the favorite in the open U.S. Senate race.<sup>2</sup>

Son of former U.S. Senator Wallace Bennett, Bob Bennett was no stranger to Utah politics. He ran his father's last two U.S. Senate campaigns in 1962 and 1968. In addition, he spent several years employed as the head of Congressional Relations in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., "Cannon Sets Sights on Succeeding Garn in D.C.," *Deseret News*, 22 July 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Bob Bernick, Jr., "Geneva Chief Was Top Contributor to Utah Politicians," *Deseret News*, 15 November 1990.

Department of Transportation, a political appointment under President Richard Nixon. Despite these connections and the 24 years that his father spent as a senator, most Utahns had never heard of the junior Bennett. “The state changed a lot during those 18 years, and political memories are pretty short,” said Greg Hopkins, Bennett’s assistant campaign manager and former director of the state Republican Party.<sup>3</sup> Despite recent success as the CEO of a major Salt Lake City business, Bennett remained unknown to most Utahns. His only foray into Utah politics was a largely unpublicized 1990 run for a nonpartisan state school board seat, a race he narrowly lost to the sister of U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch.<sup>4</sup> Other Republicans entered the Senate race, but the personal financial fortunes of Cannon and Bennett clearly set them apart from the rest.

On the Democratic side, Wayne Owens faced an intraparty challenge from businessman and former Harvard Business School Professor Doug Anderson. Owens grew up in the rural town of Panguitch in southern Utah. He graduated from the University of Utah with both undergraduate and law degrees. Actively engaged in politics at an early age, Owens became the western states coordinator for the 1968 Robert Kennedy presidential campaign. He spent the next five years as a staffer for Senators Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts and Frank Moss of Utah. Following this, the 35-year old Owens won a seat in the House of Representatives, his first run for public office.<sup>5</sup>

A fifth-generation Utahn, Anderson completed two degrees from Utah State University in his hometown of Logan, Utah. Like the other challengers, Anderson was

---

<sup>3</sup> Greg Hopkins, interview by author, 7 April 2011, Salt Lake City. Hopkins worked on the Bennett campaign after the convention and through the general election. Before this, he served as the campaign manager for Republican candidate Ted Stewart. He was appointed Bennett’s first chief of staff in 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Scarlet, “Two New Faces Join State School Board,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 November 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Jay M. Haymond, “Douglas Wayne Owens,” in *Utah History Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Kent Powell (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 405.



Mormon and served for two years as a missionary in Europe. He spent most of his professional life on the East Coast, working at the Harvard Business School, U.S. Treasury Department, and as a Capitol Hill aide. In addition to a strong resumé in business and government, Anderson brought a sizeable personal fortune to the campaign. He joined Cannon and Bennett as millionaires willing to spend their fortunes to win the election.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> “Campaign ’92 Candidates for Senator on the Issues,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 September 1992.

## DELEGATES: UTAH'S POLITICAL ELITES

Utah's caucus-convention system vested significant power in state delegates to select party nominees. While the majority of states select candidates through a direct primary, Utah operates a lesser-known and more complex process of party caucuses and state conventions. In 1992, only seven other states utilized caucus-convention systems. Other states held symbolic conventions with straw polls and similar devices to gauge candidate support, but Utah's caucus-convention system controlled a candidate's access to the ballot.

Each candidate knew that the first step toward winning an election began in the spring with the selection of delegates in neighborhood caucuses. In 1992, Republicans and Democrats gathered on April 27 in small community assemblies to elect state delegates to their respective party conventions. Approximately 1,500 of these community meetings were held across the state in political units called precincts. These districts were small, comprising an average of 500 registered voters per unit. Depending on local party rules, caucuses could be held at public buildings or in the home of a precinct member. Turnout at the 1992 neighborhood caucuses varied greatly. Sometimes only one or two voters attended while other gatherings included well over a hundred participants. Occasionally, no one came to a precinct meeting and the local party assigned a delegate. A candidate able to earn 70 percent of the 2,500 delegates selected

at the party caucuses would win the nomination outright. If no candidate reached that threshold, the top two vote getters would face off in a September primary election.<sup>1</sup>

Delegates are not required to pledge themselves to a particular candidate at the caucus meeting. This differs from the country's most well-known caucus system in Iowa where delegates are required to vote for their meeting's preferred presidential candidates. The BYU study of 1992 neighborhood caucus meetings revealed that most delegates did not commit to any particular politician. Occasionally individual precincts asked delegates to support specific candidates during the caucus meeting, but the state convention granted each delegate a secret ballot. In a 1992 poll, 20 percent of Republican caucus attendees reported that delegates committed to a candidate during their precinct's meeting. In comparison, only nine percent of Republican delegates said that they had committed to a candidate at their caucus. Democratic attendees and delegates reported no such disparities. The Republican finding underscores the independence heightened by the power of a secret ballot.<sup>2</sup>

Various interest groups tried to influence the caucuses. Most prominent among them was the Utah Education Association. With significant effort placed on organizing for the neighborhood gatherings, nine percent of delegate positions went to those affiliating with the group, most of them in the Democratic Party. Other groups attempted to influence the delegate selections with little success. The analysis of Scruggs and Magleby indicated a process highly resistant to organization by campaigns or special interest groups. They wrote:

---

<sup>1</sup> Scruggs and Magleby, "Delegates as Trustees," 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

In researching this paper, we were informed by countless anecdotes of caucus attendees who voted for a would-be delegate, not because of the delegate's candidate preferences, but because he or she was a well known neighbor who was likely to be a lay ecclesiastical leader (Mormons have no local paid clergy) or their child's Sunday School teacher, Little League coach or classroom parent.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the considerable efforts of candidates and interest groups to influence caucus outcomes, neighborly ties trumped political organization.<sup>4</sup>

Polls indicated that delegates were more wealthy, educated, partisan (especially Republicans), Mormon, and male than voters. While 29 percent of registered GOP voters made less than \$25,000 a year, this income group comprised only 13 percent of Republican delegates. Democratic delegates reported similar findings with 40 percent of voters earning less than \$25,000 while only 30 percent of delegates made a similar amount. Wealthy voters attended caucus meetings in considerably higher numbers and were consequently elected to more delegate positions. Because of the delegates' significant political influence, the absence of lower-income delegates hampered their clout.<sup>5</sup>

Educational attainment also separated those elected to delegate positions from the general public. Forty-two percent of GOP voters graduated from college, but 65 percent of delegates earned degrees. Similarly, 37 percent of Democrats had earned college diplomas, but 59 percent of Democratic delegates shared this educational status. The same poll showed that those attending caucuses were more likely to be educated than registered voters but still less than delegates. The 1992 caucus-convention process

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 31.

disproportionately favored those with higher educational achievement.<sup>6</sup>

Degrees of political ideology also were evident within the caucus system. GOP delegates were much more likely to self-identify as “very conservative” (44 percent) as compared to Republican primary voters (23 percent). In contrast, only 13 percent of Democratic delegates identified themselves as “very liberal” with nine percent of Democratic voters adopting a similar label. Interestingly, Democratic delegates were more likely to call themselves “moderate” than a typical Democratic voter (36 to 26 percent). The campaign teams were aware of these ideological differences. In explaining its campaign strategy to attract GOP voters, a Bennett campaign consultant said, “A total of 59 percent are delegates for serious, philosophical/ issue-type reasons. This is very different than a primary, much less a general election, and these voters must be treated very differently.”<sup>7</sup> Dave Jones, campaign manager for Owens, explained his similar approach. “Strategy-wise, you run to the left in a convention and run to the right in the general.”<sup>8</sup> A campaign consultant encouraged Bennett to follow this course in mirror image. “My advice to you is to protect yourself on the Right.”<sup>9</sup> A more ideologically driven pool of delegate voters required candidates to appeal in more partisan ways than typically employed in a general or even primary election.<sup>10</sup>

With religion a key factor in local politics—67 percent of Utahns belonged to the Mormon Church at the time—Scruggs and Magleby asked caucus participants to identify both their faith and degree of commitment. The poll revealed that Republican delegates self-identified as “very active” LDS 83 percent of the time, far outpacing the GOP (68

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum from Donald Devine. “Final Convention Plan—Following May Poll,” Bennett collection.

<sup>8</sup> Dave Jones, interview by author, 20 April 2011, Salt Lake City.

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 30 October 1991, Bennett collection.

<sup>10</sup> Scruggs and Magleby, “Delegates as Trustees,” 31.

percent) and state (46 percent) averages. Utah historian Thomas Alexander pointed out the strong correlation between the Mormon Church and the Republican Party. He wrote:

A recent tendency for Mormons to join the Republican Party en masse has raised the distinct possibility of a return to the religiously divided politics of the nineteenth century when nearly all of the Mormons were members of the People's Party and virtually all non-Mormons joined the Liberal Party.<sup>11</sup>

Religion played a key role in the political affiliation of both Mormons and non-Mormons in the state. On the Republican side, the caucuses proved Alexander's argument in even greater numbers than general voting trends indicated.

The Democratic caucuses provided a more complicated narrative that displayed somewhat contradictory evidence to Alexander's conclusion. Most Democratic voters did not affiliate with the LDS Church. Voters selected "no preference" more often than "very active LDS," with Catholics, "somewhat active LDS," and Protestants trailing close behind. Yet the 1992 caucuses revealed a strong religious divide among Democratic Party delegates. Thirty-nine percent of the delegates reported a high level of commitment to the Mormon Church, more than double the average for Democratic voters (18 percent). Mormon leaders encourage members to participate actively in civic functions, perhaps a key factor in the overrepresentation of its member in both parties. With significant numbers of highly motivated Mormons wielding important power within the Democratic Party caucuses, Alexander's argument needs to be more nuanced. The 1992 Republican caucuses were overwhelming Mormon, but Democratic caucuses showed much religious diversity, including a significant number of practicing Mormons.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Thomas G. Alexander, *Utah, The Right Place: The Official Centennial History* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2003), 420.

<sup>12</sup> Scruggs and Magleby, "Delegates as Trustees," 30-31.

The gender gap is evident in both parties, but especially telling in the selection of Republican delegates. Women outnumber men among GOP registered voters, but men won 63 percent of delegate positions. The margin was much smaller in the Democratic Party with women making up 52 percent of voters and 47 percent of delegates. With men controlling the bulk of delegate positions, women's issues were often ignored, especially in the Republican convention.

Once the delegates were chosen, yet before the convention, candidates for office moved to court supporters. Scruggs and Magleby note:

It is difficult to overstate for those unacquainted with the Utah system, how heavily the delegates are lobbied during the seven to eight weeks separating the caucuses from the conventions....That there was ample opportunity for the delegates to meet personally with the various candidates is evidenced by the 91% of the Republican delegates who reported they had met with all or most of the candidates for governor and senator.<sup>13</sup>

Utah's caucus-convention process provided an environment of retail politics where delegates expected individual attention from the various candidates. Extensive polling took place during the brief eight-week window with 84 percent of GOP delegates reporting that they had been polled five or more times leading up to the convention. Approximately 55 percent were polled more than 10 times. Candidates recognize that delegates wield a tremendous amount of power in the state, particularly in the Republican Party where the GOP nomination almost always translates to victory in the general election.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

## THE PUSH TO SEVENTY PERCENT

In June, Republican and Democratic delegates gathered at state nominating conventions to select their party's candidates for federal and state office. Campaigns had scrambled to court newly elected delegates who would control their political fate. A competitive slate of races—open U.S. Senate, gubernatorial, and congressional seats—gave the 1992 conventions added importance. If a candidate could win 70 percent of the delegate vote, he or she would win the nomination outright. If no one reached this number, the state would hold a primary election between the top two campaigns.

On the Republican side, the Joe Cannon and Bob Bennett strategies differed mostly due to where each candidate began the contest. “Cannon was the frontrunner from the beginning,” Bennett’s assistant campaign manager said. “Cannon was the establishment guy. He was in the race really early. And their strategy was to build a case of inevitability.”<sup>1</sup> Cannon’s early campaign advertising emphasized his strong lead and, despite a heavy registered Republican advantage, the political strength of the presumptive Democratic nominee, Wayne Owens. In one of his first campaign mailers, Cannon stated: “We are going to beat Wayne Owens. But we will need to do it together. Wayne is well recognized as one of the best fundraisers and campaigners in the entire U.S. Congress....A party divided will lose the Senate seat to Wayne Owens.”<sup>2</sup> While warning

---

<sup>1</sup> Hopkins interview.

<sup>2</sup> “Joe Cannon for Senate,” Campaign Advertisement Letter, 4 December 1991, Utah State Republican Central Committee Papers, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah (hereafter cited as JWML).



of Owens worked to Cannon's advantage, his assessment of the Democrat was not exaggerated. Owens began the race with higher name identification than any of his challengers for the Senate seat. If they avoided a contentious and expensive primary fight, Republicans could focus on bringing down the sitting congressman. Cannon staked out a position as the early Republican frontrunner in hopes of uniting the party behind him for the difficult general election ahead.

While the Cannon strategy made political sense, potential Republican candidates had no desire to clear the way for an easy Cannon nomination. The 1992 election was only the second time in Utah history that an open U.S. Senate seat existed. Candidates waited years for this kind of opportunity and had no intention of retreating. Bennett entered the race hoping to claim the seat once held by his father. Other well-connected Republicans challenged Cannon, but each, including Bennett, clearly came into the race as underdogs. Brent Ward, a former U.S. attorney for Utah, touted his experience aggressively prosecuting pornography in the state, including the removal of Salt Lake City's only X-rated movie theater. Ted Stewart entered the race well connected to the Utah political establishment thanks to his time as a staffer for U.S. Representative Jim Hansen. He later served on the Utah Public Service Commission, a post that allowed him to burnish his free-market credentials, albeit in relative anonymity. Stewart presented a palatable choice to delegates. "Someone must be willing to stand up and tell the people of this country the truth," his campaign brochures announced. "A contest between Ted Stewart and Wayne Owens would be a classic campaign between a conservative

Republican and an eastern-style liberal Democrat.”<sup>3</sup> While the message was right, Stewart lacked the funding to spread it adequately.<sup>4</sup>

Bennett focused on Cannon as the frontrunner, but also on challengers who could deny him a place on the primary ballot. Bennett’s staff regarded Ward as a significant challenger who could close the gap on Cannon. One campaign consultant pointed out, “The strongest candidate is Ward. He looks and talks like the two most successful state politicians (Garn and Hatch).”<sup>5</sup> His only problem: “He does not have money.”<sup>6</sup> Sensing an angry electorate, Ward delivered a message of dramatic change. “It’s time for a rebellion,” his campaign brochure proclaimed. “Today we are spending \$1.78 for every \$1.00 of tax revenue. This is because of gutless wonders in Congress who can’t say ‘no.’”<sup>7</sup> While the message resonated with some voters, the anger pushed others away. “Ward and Stewart give them solutions but Ward comes on too strong and Stewart cannot get the resources to be competitive,” a Bennett consultant reported.<sup>8</sup> Heading into the convention, Cannon remained the frontrunner with Bennett holding on to second place.

Republican leaders in the Utah State Legislature proposed a bill making a key rule change that altered each campaign’s convention strategy. Various party elites wanted a multiple-round balloting system to eliminate confrontational primary challenges. The past format consisted of a single ballot that included all Republican candidates. As more candidates filed for a particular office it was difficult for a frontrunner to win 70 percent

---

<sup>3</sup> “Conservative Values; Real Solutions,” Campaign Advertisement of Ted Stewart, Bennett collection.

<sup>4</sup> “Ward Set to Run for Senate Seat,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 December 1991; Paul Rolly, “Wary PSC Chairman Enters Race for U.S. Senate,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 August 1991.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Devine to John Harmer, 1 May 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> “In 1992 Utahn’s [sic] Don’t Just Want a Senator. They Want a Rebellion,” Campaign Advertisement of Brent Ward, Bennett collection.

<sup>8</sup> Memorandum from Donald Devine. “Final Convention Plan—Following May Poll,” Bennett collection.

of the total convention vote and avoid a primary runoff in September. Multiple-round balloting would eliminate candidates after each round until only two were left. If on this last ballot the winner did not cross the delegate vote threshold, a primary election would be held between the top two finishers. Just a few months before both party conventions, the Utah State Legislature passed the bill but with a delayed implementation that mandated this form of balloting at state conventions beginning in 1993. Republicans expected the changes to be approved immediately, going so far as to send instructions on how they should implement the process in the 1992 convention. The amendment meant the U.S. Senate race would maintain the single ballot. This significantly changed the campaign strategy of the various candidates. Under multiple ballot rules, Cannon realistically could win 70 percent of the delegate vote. With the return to a single vote, he faced a likely primary challenge. Just days before the convention, Cannon told the *Deseret News*, “There's a mathematical possibility I could get 70 percent, but really only a mathematical chance. It looks like a primary, and that's fine.”<sup>9</sup> The convention would demonstrate his political strength before the critical primary and general elections. For the remaining Republican candidates, the goal was simpler. “I only had to come in second,” Bennett recalled.<sup>10</sup> Most expected him to emerge from the convention, but to make it to the primary, he could not lose ground to the other candidates while chipping away at Cannon’s lead.<sup>11</sup>

On the day of the convention, Cannon delivered a surprise with the unannounced appearance of country music legend Lee Greenwood singing his popular song, “God

---

<sup>9</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., “Senate Underdogs Hope to Make Waves,” *Deseret News*, 23 June 1992.

<sup>10</sup> Bob Bennett, interview by author, 21 April 2011, Salt Lake City.

<sup>11</sup> Memorandum from Bruce Hough, GOP State Chairman, 2 March 1992, Utah Republican State Central Committee – State Files – State Central Committee (1973-1993), JWML.

Bless the U.S.A.” Many in the crowd responded enthusiastically, singing along with the star. Stewart’s campaign manager said, “It was pretty impressive to be in that arena and have a surprise of Lee Greenwood walk on stage who was a superstar at the time.”<sup>12</sup> A 1992 Republican delegate remembered the experience differently. “Suddenly you had this huge American flag drop. It had a certain effect, breathtaking would be the word,” he said. “But I thought it was completely over the top.”<sup>13</sup> While the Greenwood appearance undoubtedly created a significant buzz at the convention, it is unclear whether or not the performance drove many voters in any particular direction.

Bennett’s plan to secure the runner-up position was nearly thwarted. While underfinanced and modestly represented at the convention, Stewart delivered an impressive convention speech that moved enough delegates to make the race competitive. “He knocked it out of the park,” his campaign manager recalled. “Honestly going in, I didn’t think we’d get that close.”<sup>14</sup> Others similarly remembered Stewart’s convention performance. “[He] gave the speech of his life, and my speech was badly botched,” Bennett said.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, Cannon easily outpaced both challengers with nearly double their votes at 1,112, or 46 percent. Bennett came in second with 580 votes, or 24 percent, just nosing out Stewart by 1.5 percent. Ward, meanwhile, faded from contention and finished a distant fourth in the balloting. Some political insiders considered Cannon’s

---

<sup>12</sup> Hopkins interview.

<sup>13</sup> Kevin Glade, interview by author, 18 April 2011, telephone conversation.

<sup>14</sup> Hopkins interview.

<sup>15</sup> Bennett interview.

performance a failure, yet given Stewart's surprising surge and the consequent scare to Bennett, neither primary challenger lost much momentum from the convention results.<sup>16</sup>

Even with a convincing victory, the correlation between convention success and primary momentum is tenuous. "Nobody else is paying any attention," Bennett said of the process. "None of the voters have any idea what's going on. But within the party, within the convention, everybody is intense. And when it's over, the general public says, 'Is there a primary coming up? What is this?'"<sup>17</sup> Cannon remained the favorite heading into the primary with Bennett hoping to stage an upset.

Utah's caucus-convention system created campaign considerations unique to the state. An underfunded candidate can often be competitive in a race due to the smaller delegate pool, as Stewart evidenced with a surprisingly strong performance. A primary election is different as a much larger number of voters enter the conversation. Unable to raise significant funds from sources outside of friends and family, most candidates relied upon their own resources. With Cannon spending millions on the race, the only challenger able to keep pace was the millionaire Bennett. Trying to win over the 2,500 state delegates proved expensive for the Republican candidates. Cannon spent \$3.6 million prior to the convention with Bennett following suit at just over \$1 million. Brent Ward spent \$121,000 with Stewart trailing behind at \$71,000. The small number of delegates allowed underfunded candidates to compete in the convention as Stewart demonstrated. Yet in the 1992 Senate race, the biggest spenders moved on to the primary. The ousted Stewart said, "The cold, hard fact remains that it was still the guys

---

<sup>16</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., "Convention Yields Lots of Surprises," *Deseret News*, 28 June 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Bennett interview; Bob Bernick Jr. and Jerry Spangler, "Convention Yields Lots of Surprises," *Deseret News*, 28 June 1992.

with all the money that came out of convention. And even if the poor guy came out he would have probably gotten stomped in the primary.”<sup>18</sup> The disparity between the candidates’ finances was especially revealing with Cannon spending 50 times more than Stewart before the convention.<sup>19</sup>

On the Democratic side, Owens adopted the Cannon strategy, maintaining that the party should unite behind its leading candidate. Anderson fought back vigorously. The millionaire’s willingness to spend money on the race complicated Owens’ path to the nomination. Preconvention financial reports showed Anderson spending \$727,063 compared to Owens’ \$646,698. Candidates who challenge incumbents often struggle to fundraise, but Anderson’s personal wealth solved this problem. His willingness to spend his own personal fortune guaranteed Owens a difficult race.

Some party leaders believed that Owens could reach the 70 percent threshold and avoid a primary runoff. Many discouraged Anderson from mounting serious opposition, but the millionaire refused to surrender. He entered the race nearly a year before Owens when most expected Garn to run for reelection. Having spent a significant amount of time and money well before Owens’ decision to run, Anderson was in it to the end. He felt Owens’ position as an insider tainted him in the eyes of many voters. Despite the daunting prospects of defeating a sitting congressman, Anderson geared up for a tough fight.<sup>20</sup>

Anderson was not alone in his views of Owens. His candidacy revealed deep fissures within a declining Utah Democratic Party. While Owens received important

---

<sup>18</sup> Dan Harrie, “Campaign Costs Driving Away Many Middle-Class Candidates,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 14 September 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Scruggs and Magleby, “Delegates as Trustees,” 8.

<sup>20</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., “Demo Senate Hopefuls Assess Their Chances,” *Deseret News*, 8 June 1992.

union support from the Utah Education Association and AFL-CIO, former political leaders such as Governor Cal Rampton and Senator Frank Moss lined up behind Anderson. The Sierra Club supported the Owens campaign while Anderson lobbied rural Democrats who often opposed the large-scale wilderness designations that Owens favored. Rampton believed Anderson had a better chance to win the general election. “[Owens is] not a favorite to win in any case,” he said. “It’s not impossible. But given the political makeup of this state, he’ll have a difficult time.”<sup>21</sup> A fractured Democratic Party hurt an already struggling Owens campaign.<sup>22</sup>

The location of the state convention played an important role in the Anderson strategy. While 2,500 state delegates are selected from across the state, a significant number do not attend the convention. The highly competitive races attracted 2,245 delegates, a number the *Deseret News* called “one of the largest turnouts of Democrats in recent history.”<sup>23</sup> Still, this figure indicated that 255 delegates—10 percent—did not show up to the convention. Anderson believed much of his support came from rural Democrats who opposed Owens’ support of wilderness legislation. “If we can get our delegates to the convention, OK,” Anderson said. “But you know it’s a long way from Kanab,” a town in distant southern Utah. Mobilizing voters in rural Utah understandably concerned the Anderson campaign.

In the final vote tally, Owens won 1,564 votes, or 69.7 percent, to Anderson’s 645. A third candidate, Kyle Kopitke, won a meager 36 votes or less than two percent of the total vote. If state leaders had instituted multiple-round balloting in 1992, Owens

---

<sup>21</sup> Dawn House, “Owens Responds to Attacks by Getting Back to Issues,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 March 1992.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Rolly, “On the Stump: Utah’s Campaign ’92 With Paul Rolly,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 30 April 1992; Paul Rolly, “On the Stump: Utah’s Campaign ’92 With Paul Rolly,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 23 April 1992.

<sup>23</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., “Owens Misses Nomination By 8 Votes,” *Deseret News*, 14 June 1992.

would have needed only eight votes from the Kopitke total to cross the 70 percent threshold. Ironically, it was Owens' campaign manager Dave Jones (also a state representative) who pushed the amendment in the state legislature to delay the implementation of multiple-round balloting. Jones' argument was that the campaign had already begun, and that the state should not change the rules mid-race. More importantly, the Owens campaign feared that Cannon would reach the 70 percent mark under multiple-ballot rules and thereby avoid an expensive Republican primary. The tactic forced Cannon into a primary challenge but came back to hurt the Owens candidacy as Anderson squeaked out of the Democratic convention and into the primary.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Paul Rolly, "Keep 'Em Coming," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 22 June 1992; Bob Bernick Jr., "Owens Misses Nomination By 8 Votes."



## PRIMARY: BATTLEGROUND OF CONSERVATISM

Almost every poll heading into the Republican primary indicated Bob Bennett trailed significantly. “Throughout the state there was an assumption that Joe Cannon was going to be the nominee,” one Bennett staff member recalled.<sup>1</sup> Especially telling is how the most competitive part of the electoral process occurred not in the general election, but in the Republican primary. This important trend underscored the accelerated shift to the political right in Utah.

Few issues separated Cannon and Bennett. As the underdog, Bennett ran an aggressive campaign with Cannon clearly ahead in the race. “The leading issue for Republican primary voters is the economy (27%) followed by the budget (24%) and unemployment (8%), accounting for 60% of the electorate,” a Bennett campaign consultant reported.<sup>2</sup> On each issue, the candidates largely agreed. Economic issues trumped all others across the country and in the minds of Utah voters, but the similar views of Cannon and Bennett in regard to reducing government spending and cutting taxes prevented them from shaping the election.

Issues that separated the pair were minor points and included the line-item veto, term limits, and political action committee donations. Term limits provided Bennett a chance to separate himself from Cannon. He was not alone as a term-limit fever swept the nation. In the 1992 election, 14 states passed laws that limited the number of years a

---

<sup>1</sup> Larry Shepherd, interview by author, 4 April 2011, Salt Lake City.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 9 July 1992.

member of Congress could serve, bills that the Supreme Court later ruled unconstitutional. The Utah Republican Party adopted language into its official 1992 platform that said, “We believe in the concept of term limitation. We recognize and support term limitation as framed in the U.S. Constitution.”<sup>3</sup> The absence of term limitation language in the U.S. Constitution complicated this stance, but poll numbers indicated that Utahns favored congressional term limits by a 36 percent margin.<sup>4</sup>

Bennett cast the issue of the line-item veto as a way to enforce fiscal discipline in the federal budgetary process. The president could veto any project passed in the annual congressional appropriations bills without vetoing the entire bill. Cannon disagreed, calling the policy position a “glib, political solution.”<sup>5</sup> Internal polling indicated that most voters sided with Bennett on the issue, opposing the position of Cannon and sitting U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch. A campaign memo explained:

The question of Hatch/Cannon vs Bennett on line item veto separates in our favor better than any other in the poll—61.7 percent to 14.0 percent (and many of the opposed are less knowledgeable). This is not an issue that voters think of themselves, however, so it would have to be sold, strongly.<sup>6</sup>

Voters needed to be prompted on the issue before volunteering it. “We suspect that many people do not understand what the line item veto really means,” a Bennett consultant suggested.<sup>7</sup> While not the ideal issue, Bennett sensed an opening and pursued it.

---

<sup>3</sup> “Utah Republican Party Constitution,” Utah State Republican Central Committee Papers: State Files -- Conventions (1988-1992), JWML.

<sup>4</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., “Majority of Utahns favor limits on politicians’ terms,” *Deseret News*, 20 April 1991; “14 States Slap Term Limits on Congressional Delegates,” *Deseret News*, 4 November 1992; Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 1992 Elections* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc.), 298.

<sup>5</sup> Sheila R. McCann, “Bennett welcomes Cannon flip-flop on line-item veto,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 16 August 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 9 July 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Devine to John Harmer, 6 August 1992, Bennett collection.

Bennett prepared to run commercials criticizing Cannon for his position on the issue. Recognizing his vulnerability, Cannon abandoned his stance and supported the line-item veto with Bennett, President George Bush, and a host of other Republicans. The move infuriated insiders in the Bennett camp. "That information in [his] hands cost us the opportunity to hammer Cannon with the one basic philosophical difference between he and Bennett."<sup>8</sup> Bennett jumped on the change in position, although the issue was unimportant for many voters, limiting damage to Cannon.

Interestingly, Bennett would later renege on both of the campaign policies that differentiated him from Cannon. He served three terms in the Senate and lost seeking a fourth, clear violations of his support for term limits and promise to serve only two terms. While initially supporting efforts to establish a line-item veto, he recanted that position as well. Six years after the 1992 race, he specifically mentioned this issue in a speech on the Senate floor:

I apologize albeit much too late, to my primary opponent who stood in opposition to the line-item veto. And this was a matter of difference between the two of us in the primary....I, as one senator at least on the other side of the issue, throw in the towel, eat a little crow and declare my willingness to escape from a previous position.<sup>9</sup>

Cannon chose not to accept donations from political action committees in the campaign, something Bennett refused to do. "I figure that's about \$500,000 I won't be getting from PACs," Cannon said. "I've been in Washington. I know how it works. They [PAC special interests] expect something for that money. I'll listen to anyone. But I don't want to have to listen because of [a PAC contribution]."<sup>10</sup> Bennett argued that Cannon's disdain for such contributions was hypocritical. Specifically, he criticized Cannon's

---

<sup>8</sup> John Harmer to Donald Devine, 25 August 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>9</sup> 105 Cong. Rec. S698 (daily ed. Feb. 12, 1998) (statement of Sen. Bennett).

<sup>10</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., "Cannon Sets Sights on Succeeding Garn in D.C.," *Deseret News*, 22 July 1991.

campaign donations to other candidates while employed at Geneva Steel. Similar to the line-item veto, the issue moved few GOP voters and ultimately had minor impact on the race.

Except for these policy disagreements, the two candidates offered little to differentiate themselves. As Bennett told one newspaper reporter:

Joe and I don't have great ideological differences. We're both white, middle-class, middle-age male Mormons. We're both chief executive officers. In fact, this is probably the only race in the nation between the former CEOs of companies listed on the New York Stock Exchange.<sup>11</sup>

The claim of “middle class” was clearly an exaggeration for two multimillionaires, but Bennett had a point. Not much separated the candidates either politically or temperamentally.

With no ideological difference between the candidates, the campaign largely revolved around personality. Bennett attempted to center his campaign on a theme of change with he the most likely to effect it. Cannon arguably did the same but with a softer edge. The Bennett message eventually resonated with voters across the ideological spectrum who wanted to shake up the Washington establishment. Critical to shaping Bennett's image was a successful ad campaign that sharpened the differences in personality and style between the candidates. Television and radio would create a candidate, conservative in policy, determined to confront Washington insiders, and who spoke with authority. Ads would give him the advantage he lacked from elected experience and high-profile success.

---

<sup>11</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., “4 Utah Senate candidates try to stand apart,” *Deseret News*, 20 July 1992.

Both Bennett and Cannon came across as strong, mainstream conservatives, but as one campaign staffer said, “[The race] was more about style than it was substance.”<sup>12</sup> This style was best displayed through the campaign advertising of each candidate. A political mentor wrote Bennett, “Your discovery of that talented ad agency was a ‘ten-strike’—they were truly creative and ‘took the town by storm.’”<sup>13</sup> Another analyst wrote, “Not that ad spots should be the ultimate measure of a man’s character, but they may very well have been the deciding factor here because many Republicans perceived little philosophical separation between the two men.”<sup>14</sup> The ads, while not exposing any significant ideological disparity between the candidates, displayed an important stylistic difference.

The Bennett ads took a sharp, contrasting approach. While he spoke throughout the spot, the camera angle and background abruptly shifted. Bennett recalled:

All of the sudden it’s just my lips. And then it’s just my eyes. And then I’m in profile not looking at you, looking off to the side. And then I’m in black and white. And then I’ve got a suit and tie on and the background has changed from black to white and so on. And under it is this driving music.<sup>15</sup>

The innovative Bennett ads proved effective. “We called it the MTV approach at the time because of the very quick cuts and very close-up and back away and with Bennett giving a really strong, dynamic message,” one campaign staffer recalled.<sup>16</sup> “You’ve got to break through the clutter with an ad that everybody will remember,” Bennett said. “The campaign does not take place in a vacuum.” He continued:

---

<sup>12</sup> Hopkins interview.

<sup>13</sup> J.D. Williams to Bennett, 15 December 1992. J.D. Williams Papers – Election Materials 1992-1998, JWML.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Morris, “Post-Partisan Blues,” *Utah County Journal*, 11 September 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>15</sup> Bennett interview.

<sup>16</sup> Hopkins interview.

In the primary, you are competing with Budweiser ads, baseball, Breck Shampoo. You're not just competing Bennett versus Cannon. It's not a matter of here's so many Bennett ads and here's so many Cannon ads....There are so many ads, how do you break through the clutter?<sup>17</sup>

The message was simple: change. Somebody needed to stand up to Washington, and the cutting ads reinforced an image of a politician willing to go back to Congress and do just that.

Other campaign pundits seem less impressed. "I don't often see my wife's face that close up, and she's much prettier than Bob," one said.<sup>18</sup> Bennett recalled anecdotal evidence from voters. "That ad started to run, and I had women come up to me in the grocery store and complain bitterly, 'I hate your ads, they jump around too much. I can't follow them.' And I'm thinking, 'But you're watching them.'"<sup>19</sup> The Bennett ads effectively combined a modern, visually provocative approach with a conservative tone and message.

Cannon pursued a much more traditional method to his television advertising. What the commercials lacked in novelty they made up for in quantity. Cannon spent more than \$3 million on radio and television advertising, significantly outspending Bennett and any other candidate in Utah political history. Before the election, television advertisers reported that one in every eight commercials on the three network stations was a political commercial, nearly half coming from the expensive Republican Senate primary. Cannon and Bennett spent so much that television stations refused airtime to candidates for lesser statewide offices. One of Bennett's press aides at the time recalled, "We were still in an age back then when you could buy enough TV time to saturate the

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Morris, "Post-Partisan Blues," *Utah County Journal*.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett interview.

market,” he said. “Now there are too many choices.”<sup>20</sup> Saturating the market came with risks. Bennett later explained:

The whole question is stickiness. Do you remember the ad? Does it stick? The Cannon ads were all very traditional, off the shelf, standard political ads. And therefore people would forget them. And then when he ran as many as he did, people were sick of them....There is such a thing as being overexposed.<sup>21</sup>

Even Cannon supporters credited the Bennett ads for their candidate’s defeat. A Cannon voter complained in a letter to the editor, “In my opinion, the best man didn’t win. The best ad agency did.”<sup>22</sup> Looking back at the race, a prominent Bennett staffer recalled, “We would not have won the primary without [the] advertising.”<sup>23</sup> The chief of staff for Wayne Owens echoed this. “We did focus groups and everyone liked the Bennett ads a lot. They really stood out in a sea of ads.”<sup>24</sup> Cannon outspent Bennett in advertising, but the innovative Bennett ads held the attention of voters, particularly those disenchanted with the current political environment. With virtually no substantive issues separating the two candidates, the race came down to style with many undecided voters siding with the aggressor Bennett.<sup>25</sup>

Cannon’s campaign strategy focused on entering the race with a big splash, spending millions of dollars in the early stages of the race. Initially the strategy worked as Cannon developed a seemingly insurmountable lead. Bennett tried to counter with his own spending. In a campaign memo, consultants outlined how he could effectively do this:

---

<sup>20</sup> Shepherd interview.

<sup>21</sup> Bennett interview.

<sup>22</sup> Yvonne Parkin, “Best Ad Agency Won the Election,” *Deseret News*, 19 September 1992.

<sup>23</sup> Hopkins interview.

<sup>24</sup> Kay Christensen, interview by author, 15 April 2011, Salt Lake City.

<sup>25</sup> Mike Carter, “Campaign ’92: They’re Coming for You – Just Try to Escape Pre-Primary Ads,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 6 September 1992; Christopher Smart, “Money Talks, Leaves Others Out,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 21 August 1992.

We need to be able to do something that will accomplish two objectives: First: Make Cannon's greatest asset become his biggest liability. Every time someone [sic] sees a Joe Cannon ad they have to immediately react by saying – "...there he goes again, wasting money." Second: Bennett has to be able to avoid the 'big spender' label. This can only be done by some comparison with the amount that Cannon is spending.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the \$2.1 million that Bennett spent from his fortune on the GOP primary, it was Cannon who appeared the spendthrift, almost tripling Bennett's expenditures. In contrast, Bennett largely escaped criticism for his significant spending.

Another Bennett campaign tactic portrayed Cannon as trying to buy votes. "There are two ways to get the Republican nomination for Senate," a consultant advised Bennett before a debate performance. "One way is to work your way up through the party, like Jake Garn did. The other is to just buy it outright. Joe Cannon is doing the latter. That point needs to be brought out."<sup>27</sup> Bennett made this argument, but it took time for voters to respond. As one political science professor told a *Salt Lake Tribune* reporter, "Even though people will complain, there's something flattering about millionaires spending this kind of money to get my vote."<sup>28</sup> The 1992 election proved this conventional wisdom wrong with voters questioning Cannon's fiscal discipline.

In a draft campaign spot, Bennett compared Cannon's campaign spending to congressional spending, a major concern among Utah voters. "There is a difference between Bob Bennett and Joe Cannon. A big one. Debt. My campaign is solvent. Joe's campaign is over five million dollars in debt."<sup>29</sup> Bennett cast himself as the candidate fighting big spending, utilizing Cannon's expenditures to make a comparison between the two. In response to an open-ended poll question about why voters selected a particular

<sup>26</sup> John Harmer to Donald Devine, 21 August 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>27</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 22 August 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>28</sup> Mike Carter, "They're Coming for You – Just Try to Escape Pre-Primary Ads," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 6 September 1992.

<sup>29</sup> "First Draft – Campaign Debt Spot," Bennett collection.



candidate, one respondent said, “I think [Cannon] is spending too much money. He is trying to buy the election. I’m turned off by the money he has spent. I think it would be cheaper for him to just buy the radio stations.”<sup>30</sup> While his personal fortune allowed Cannon repeated access to voters, it also provided a wedge issue that Bennett effectively exploited, ironically by spending a significant amount of money to explain the issue to voters.

Cannon’s reputation as the man who saved Geneva Steel with its more than a thousand jobs aided him greatly in the race. Bennett also claimed a strong business resumé having earned millions as the CEO of a day-planner company. But as a Bennett campaign employee pointed out, not all business leaders are viewed the same by the voting public. “A businessman against the savior of Geneva Steel and its blue-collar jobs (a planner just does not have the romance of a steel factory).”<sup>31</sup> Relatively few people knew about Bennett’s work while nearly everyone in the state had heard about Cannon’s resurrection of the failing steel mill.

While his ownership of Geneva Steel brought Cannon great wealth and public visibility, it also brought a degree of political vulnerability. Bennett believed the issue would hurt Cannon throughout the campaign. “You may well be right that the environmentalists...will dog his footsteps, but that won’t happen until the primary at the earliest,” a consultant told Bennett.<sup>32</sup> Those attacks never materialized. The Bennett campaign decided to prod the issue, drafting ads with pictures of Geneva Steel smoke stacks shown while the narrator talks about the need for “clean, businesses of the

---

<sup>30</sup> “Bennett Campaign Poll,” 24 August 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>31</sup> Donald Devine to John Harmer, 6 July 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>32</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 30 October 1991, Bennett collection.

Information Age.”<sup>33</sup> In a campaign flyer, Bennett warned, “Owens has made it clear he’s going to attack Joe for Geneva’s pollution problems and keep him on the defensive.”<sup>34</sup> These attacks, however, failed to stick with voters. A Bennett campaign memo said: “‘Businessman’ is a tough ad and only should be run if the race will be lost anyway and, maybe, not even then. This ad does hit Cannon at his Geneva strength but it is a very hard thing to change this perception so late.”<sup>35</sup>

To protect himself from this criticism, Cannon explained the many pollution-control efforts that Geneva Steel had implemented. The measures came at a significant cost, more than double the amount Cannon and other investors initially paid to purchase the abandoned mill. “Short of shutting Geneva down, no one could have done more faster than we did at Geneva to improve the environment,” Cannon told a reporter.<sup>36</sup> Geneva Steel aired commercials that discussed the reduction in pollution since Cannon’s ownership. Cannon prepared for a serious challenge to his environmental record, but the Republican primary electorate proved more willing to accept reduced levels of pollution in exchange for economic development.<sup>37</sup>

Bennett’s polling confirmed that most Utahns wanted pollution reduced but not at the expense of jobs:

Geneva certainly does not hold the power it did among convention delegates. Few will automatically vote for Cannon on the issue and 60 percent would like its pollution reduced. Given the general disposition to favor jobs over pollution control, however, it would be dangerous to push the matter as a general proposition.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Script for a Series of Bennett Ads, “Lawyer,” Bennett collection.

<sup>34</sup> “Reasons I’m For Bob Instead of Joe,” Campaign Advertisement for Bob Bennett, Bennett collection.

<sup>35</sup> Memorandum from Donald Devine. “Analysis of August 19 Utah Primary Poll,” Bennett collection.

<sup>36</sup> “Campaign ’92 Candidates for Senator on the Issues,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 September 1992.

<sup>37</sup> “Demo Slams Cannon,” *Deseret News*, 9 February 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 9 July 1992, Bennett collection.

The Bennett campaign followed this advice, largely ignoring Cannon's success at the steel giant. Had Cannon won the primary and faced off against the pro-environment Owens in the general election, undoubtedly this issue would have played a central role in the campaign.

While sharing a conservative philosophy, a picture of a less ideologically driven Bennett emerged in private correspondence. One campaign consultant wrote Bennett in follow up to a previous conversation. "You have resentments left over among the true believers from your father's campaigns."<sup>39</sup> Bennett later recounted an interview with a Republican presidential hiring committee in 1976 when he informed the interviewer, "I'm not a true believer," regarding conservative orthodoxy.<sup>40</sup> Such indications of ideological tempering left his campaign rhetoric emotionally flat and seemingly lacking in passion. This political reticence deprived Bennett the fiery rhetoric that conservatives expected. "Your reluctance to develop a shorthand for communicating passion on hot-button issues left delegates with a feeling that you are interested in issues, but that you don't care about them deeply," a consultant said.<sup>41</sup> He postulated that the issue might be a matter of class for Bennett. He said:

It may be that you are too insulated from the middle. You do not feel their rage as I do. They are frustrated, helpless, rebellious, and ripe for ideological plucking. If you do not understand their passion, channel it constructively, explain it and justify it (to themselves and to the ruling class), then someone else will. You have not yet felt this passion because for the most part, you have been dealing so far with that ruling class itself.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 30 October 1991.

<sup>40</sup> "Outgoing Sens. Bayh, Bennett: Political Extremes Are Out of Touch," interview by Jim Lehrer, *Newshour*, PBS, 9 December 2010, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/july-dec10/compromise\\_12-09.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/july-dec10/compromise_12-09.html).

<sup>41</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 1 July 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>42</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 30 October 1991.

While passion did not come easily to Bennett, his ads constructed a personal intensity that caught voters' attention and convinced them he was their advocate.

Along with the ad campaign, Bennett credited a last-minute surge in rural counties for his victory. His contention that rural Utah would play a key role was based on the fact that while these areas comprised just 13 percent of the population in 1990, they held 27 percent of GOP voters. Weeks before the election, according to a Bennett consultant: "Cannon dominates Bennett in the rural areas on every important matter in the poll. Overall, Cannon wins 60 to 26 percent in the rural counties, a 34 point advantage there." Cannon did win the rural vote, but only by an eight percent margin of victory. He had to do better to overcome Bennett's edge in his native Salt Lake County, Utah's most populated region.<sup>43</sup>

Cannon's significant lead in rural Utah was attributable to the success of Geneva Steel. Not only did the plant employ thousands in urban Utah County, but it purchased mineral resources from numerous rural Utah suppliers. These investments expanded the footprint of the company throughout the state. "No candidate has done more than I have for the economic development of rural Utah," Cannon said.<sup>44</sup> The Bennett campaign confirmed Cannon's strength in rural Utah without the pollution liabilities he encountered in urban Utah. "Rural voters also like Geneva more, and are much more willing to accept pollution for jobs," a consultant wrote in response to a campaign poll.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Memorandum from Donald Devine, "Analysis of August 19 Utah Primary Poll."

<sup>44</sup> Sheila R. McCann, "GOP Candidates Draw Battle Lines in U.S. Senate Race," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 2 September 1992.

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 9 July 1992.

Bennett memos showed that the campaign was attuned to this finding. “Rural areas are still the Cannon difference,” one consultant warned.<sup>46</sup> Bennett’s initial rural campaign strategy focused on enlisting the help of local elected officials who would take the Bennett cause to area voters. Polling revealed the ineffectiveness of this strategy. “The clear message in the polls is that we need work in the rural areas. Talking about getting commissioners is fine but we need direct voter contact,” a consultant wrote.<sup>47</sup> Campaign staffers believed that television advertising would take care of this direct voter contact, but little movement occurred in the polls.<sup>48</sup>

Something had to change for Bennett to cut into Cannon’s lead. The campaign attempted a different media approach. One campaign staffer recalled this important shift in rural strategy. “The Bennett camp took out ads in rural newspapers comparing Joe Cannon’s spending on the Senate race to the annual budget for the particular county that paper appeared in,” he said.<sup>49</sup> These examples proved to be especially compelling in many of the counties where Cannon’s spending exceeded the county budget. The ads stated that, “Cannon campaign expenditures exceed the operating budgets of more than half of Utah’s counties.”<sup>50</sup> Rural voters responded positively to the attack. “When that hit, Joe’s people went absolutely ballistic,” Bennett said.<sup>51</sup> The Cannon camp accused Bennett of going negative, but their argument only helped reinforce the spending issue.

In addition to newspaper and television advertising, Bennett explored other options. “I went into the radio studio and I recorded a 60-second radio spot just

---

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum from Donald Devine, “Analysis of August 19 Utah Primary Poll.”

<sup>47</sup> Memorandum from Donald Devine, 15 July 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>48</sup> *Urban and Rural Population: 1900 to 1990*, U.S. Census Bureau (Washington DC, 1995); Memorandum from Donald Devine, “Analysis of August 19 Utah Primary Poll.”

<sup>49</sup> Shepherd interview.

<sup>50</sup> Brooke Adams, “Cannon Surprised By Sources of Attacks,” *Deseret News*, 5 September 1992.

<sup>51</sup> Bennett interview.

hammering on Wayne Owens.”<sup>52</sup> When Owens confronted Bennett about the spot, he replied, “I have to win a primary. You are the most hated man in rural Utah. If I’m going to win the primary, I have to prove to them that I hate you more than Joe hates you.”<sup>53</sup> The response was immediate and overwhelming. “That spot started to run, and our phones started to ring off the hook,” Bennett said. “We spent all this money on television and none of these people had heard of me....Radio was the medium to reach rural Utah.”<sup>54</sup> Because the newspaper and radio ads ran concurrently, it is difficult to gauge the effectiveness of each medium. Regardless, the Bennett campaign’s last-minute work in rural Utah proved effective enough to peel off a significant number of voters in the waning days before the primary election.

A Bennett campaign consultant raised an important point regarding the issue of different campaign media. “You can also be more direct in your attacks on Cannon on radio than you can on TV,” he said. “TV is a cool medium, and does not take well to harsh conflict. Radio is a hot medium, and can stand more fighting.”<sup>55</sup> While the Bennett TV ads were aggressive, they backed away from directly attacking Cannon. “The [television] ads...cannot have a sharp edge because the candidate appears in them (and we want to protect him from the negatives),” a consultant explained.<sup>56</sup> Different media produce different results with varying degrees of tolerance for negative attacks. The hard-hitting Bennett radio and newspaper ads proved effective in rural Utah, significantly closing the gap between the two candidates in the concluding weeks of the campaign.

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 22 August 1992.

<sup>56</sup> Memorandum from Donald Devine. “Analysis of August 19 Utah Primary Poll.”

The other significant difference in the returns occurred in Salt Lake and Utah Counties. In regard to Utah's two largest counties, pollsters expected Bennett to defeat Cannon in his native Salt Lake County with Cannon easily winning in Utah County, home to Geneva Steel. Only part of that prediction came true with Bennett outpacing Cannon in Salt Lake County, 53,155 to 42,310, an 11 percent margin. The two played to a virtual tie in Utah County with Cannon winning 23,605 to 23,462. The result came as a shock to Cannon who had called the county, "one of the biggest arrows" in his quiver.<sup>57</sup>

Just a few weeks before the election, the Bennett campaign estimated that approximately 125,000 people would vote in the Republican primary. Turnout more than doubled that expectation. A record number of voters participated in the GOP and Democratic primaries, 49 percent of registered voters in the state. "The turnout in this primary was very high, approaching levels normally found only in general elections," a Bennett campaign consultant observed.<sup>58</sup> The high turnout benefitted the insurgent Bennett who claimed a narrow 135,514 to 128,125, or 51 to 49 percent victory.<sup>59</sup>

The results came as a surprise to both campaigns. In an analysis of four different polls conducted less than two weeks before the primary election, the Bennett Campaign Steering Committee concluded that Cannon had at least a four percent lead over Bennett and maybe as large as a seven percent edge. The campaign consultant predicted, "Unless Bennett's campaign provides a dramatic way for voters to choose Bennett over Cannon

---

<sup>57</sup> Brooke Adams, "Cannon Missed Mark in Utah County," *Deseret News*, 10 September 1992.

<sup>58</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 9 September 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>59</sup> Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1992 General Election Results*. Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1992 Primary Election Results*, (Salt Lake City, 1992); "Minutes of the Bennett Campaign Steering Committee," 18 August 1992, Bennett collection; Bob Bernick Jr., "It's Bennett vs. Owens; Hanson vs. Leavitt," *Deseret News*, 9 September 1992.

the present situation will not change by the election date.”<sup>60</sup> Bennett’s last-ditch advertising push in rural Utah helped his vote tally, as did the higher turnout, a result of a hard fought and contested race.<sup>61</sup>

The Cannon campaign suffered from overconfidence. He did not go on the offensive because his polling placed him as the frontrunner. Leading until the end of the race, Cannon ignored Bennett’s vulnerabilities, especially when such attacks might produce a backlash among voters. “It was like playing defense,” a Bennett campaign staffer said.<sup>62</sup> Asked why he chose not to run attacks ads, Cannon told a newspaper reporter, “I had tremendous pressure to run ‘comparison’ ads on Bob....But we resisted. It’s not like Bob is without baggage. But life isn’t worth that....We ran a good race, we just came up 5,000 votes short.”<sup>63</sup> One political observer at the time suggested that Cannon’s decision not to attack Bennett likely cost him the election. When asked what he might have done differently, Cannon responded, “If I had it to do all over again...I probably wouldn’t have spent as much money.”<sup>64</sup> Upon hearing of Cannon’s defeat, Dave Hansen, the executive director of the Utah Republican Party said, “I never thought you could spend too much in an election until this year.”<sup>65</sup> Other observers arrived at similar conclusions.<sup>66</sup>

Controversy with spirited debate marked the primary contest between the two Democrats, Wayne Owens and Doug Anderson. A picture emerges of a bitter campaign

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> “Agenda for Bennett Campaign Steering Committee Minutes,” 27 August 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>62</sup> Hopkins interview.

<sup>63</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., “It’s Bennett vs. Owens; Hanson vs. Leavitt,” *Deseret News*, 9 September 1992.

<sup>64</sup> “Cannon Throws Support to Primary Foe Bennett,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 3 October 1992; Bob Bernick Jr., “Campaigns Keep Mudslingers Busy,” *Deseret News*, 24 October 1992.

<sup>65</sup> Vern Anderson, “Big Turnout Pares Races,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 9 August 1992.

<sup>66</sup> “Cannon unsure of next move after costly disappointments,” *Deseret News*, December 14, 1992.



between two factions within the declining Democratic Party. The party's state chairman complained, "We're a small party in Utah - just 20 percent of voters - and we certainly can't afford this."<sup>67</sup> While Republicans could endure infighting and still win, Democrats had to preserve resources and find common ground to achieve victory.

Anderson based his campaign on a Washington D.C. scandal that appeared to implicate Owens in wrongdoing. In the midst of a deep recession, this issue focused voters on congressional privilege and plenty. "The overarching issue was fiscal discipline," Dave Jones, the Owens campaign manager recalled.<sup>68</sup> An investigation revealed that the House bank utilized funds from congressmen's deposits to cover overdraft checks issued by other members. While no taxpayer funds were involved, the perception of a perk available only to members of Congress proved disastrous. "This captured the imagination of a lot of people, angered a lot of people that how can they get their fiscal house in order if they can't even balance their own checkbook?" Jones said. "Honestly, I think the [general] election was over at that point. I really do."<sup>69</sup> While not willing to admit defeat, Owens echoed the serious nature of the scandal and seemingly his involvement: "I am humiliated by it," Owens said at the time. "It is humbling, demeaning, and it's misunderstood. I'm a man who treasured my personal reputation for integrity and then this happened."<sup>70</sup> Owens did not exaggerate the situation. "He did a good job painting himself as a fiscal conservative," Jones said. "But then the check

---

<sup>67</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., "Intra-Party Fighting Dismays Leaders of Utah's Democrats," *Deseret News*, 1 September, 1992.

<sup>68</sup> Jones interview.

<sup>69</sup> Jones interview.

<sup>70</sup> Barnard L. Collier, "High Anxiety on Capitol Hill: Election Worries Utah Congressional Delegation High Anxiety on Capitol Hill," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 5 July 1992.

kiting thing came along and that just totally wiped it out.”<sup>71</sup> Polls showed a third of his support fall away in the month following the announcement of the scandal. Severely crippled, Owens never fully recovered, even after exoneration.<sup>72</sup>

Environmental issues also made Owens vulnerable. As he explained:

Environmentalism is a very tough issue in this state because those who hate the environmentalists will judge you on your environmental record alone, rather than your overall record. I received 10,000 fewer votes in Washington and Iron Counties in 1974 than I received in 1972—directly traceable to my support of the Zion Wilderness proposal.<sup>73</sup>

Anderson approved of wilderness protection but not as passionately as Owens. “I support the creation of more wilderness,” he said. “But I’m convinced my opponent’s plan to set aside an area that is three times the size of Yellowstone National Park is overkill.”<sup>74</sup>

Measured support of wilderness still allowed Anderson to win suburban and urban voters who agreed with the policy. Arguing for moderation won over rural voters who hated the Owens plan. One reporter mused, “[Owens] has been all but hung in effigy in parts of rural Utah.”<sup>75</sup> Owens’ campaign manager remembered considering rural Utah a lost cause. “Even if you won it, it wasn’t going to change things,” he said, referring to the sparse population. “[Our campaign] was almost entirely focused on urban Utah.”<sup>76</sup>

The environmental issue cut both ways for Owens. “[He] really endeared himself to the liberal base of the party with that issue,” Jones said. Environmental interest groups backed Owens with the Sierra Club calling his election its highest priority in the country. With air quality concerns plaguing the GOP’s likely candidate, Joe Cannon, Owens felt

---

<sup>71</sup> Jones interview.

<sup>72</sup> “Owens Plunges Precipitously in Polls,” *Deseret News*, 26 April 1992.

<sup>73</sup> John Sillito and Bill Slaughter, “An Interview with Wayne Owens,” 57.

<sup>74</sup> Dawn House, “Challenger Risks Own Money,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 12 June 1992.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Rolly, “Owens: Democrats’ Shining Knight?” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 January 1992.

<sup>76</sup> Jones interview.

that the issue presented him with the best chance to win in the general election. Heading into the race, polls placed him far ahead of Anderson. Consequently, Owens positioned himself early for the upcoming general election.<sup>77</sup>

Anderson expanded his attacks on Owens to include criticisms of fiscal improprieties within his congressional office. He accused the congressman of excessively using free mailing privileges at the expense of taxpayers, a practice widespread among lawmakers. He also criticized Owens' use of taxpayer-funded travel expenses and congressional pay raises. One ad concluded: "If Wayne Owens acts like this in the Congress...what's going to happen if he gets to the Senate?"<sup>78</sup> The ad campaign infuriated the Owens camp and even some Anderson supporters. Democrat leaders tried to stop Anderson's attacks but failed. Former Governor Cal Rampton and U.S. Senator Frank Moss, both supporters of Anderson, publicly rebuked him for the ads. With Anderson running scathing ads about Owens, the Democratic Congressman returned fire. Owens attempted to paint Anderson as a carpetbagger, highlighting his recent move to Utah before running for political office. Owens eventually called for a truce with each candidate removing his attack ads. Anderson refused.<sup>79</sup>

Owens' name recognition was difficult to overcome, and the heated Anderson ads 22 percent margin of victory. Yet this dominant vote tally was pyrrhic for the contentious primary significantly wounded the Democratic nominee. Bennett campaign polling confirmed this: "[Owens] does not receive the support of one-third of the

---

<sup>77</sup> Lee Davidson, "Putting Owens in Senate Is Top Priority, Sierra Club Says," *Deseret News*, 24 October 1992.

<sup>78</sup> Dawn House, "Anderson Ad Takes Aim at Owens; Cook Ready to Unload on Leavitt," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 August 1992.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Rolly, "On the Stump: Utah's Campaign '92 With Paul Rolly," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 September 1992, 14; Dawn House, "Owens Responds to Attacks By Getting Back to Issues," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 March 1992.

Democrats, suggesting that Anderson had an effect in the primary.”<sup>80</sup> Owens’ campaign manager repeated the sentiment. “It was pretty tough to bring people back together after that.”<sup>81</sup> The bitterness of the contest left hurt feelings and a weakened Democratic nominee to face Bennett in the general election.

---

<sup>80</sup> Memorandum from Donald Devine, 23 September 1992.

<sup>81</sup> Jones interview.

## A DEMOCRAT'S LAST STAND

The mood of American voters in the 1992 election indicated a desire for change, resulting in an inordinate number of competitive races for incumbents. The House of Representatives welcomed 110 new members after the 1992 elections, the highest turnover of the body in over 40 years. Most of this turnover resulted from members voluntarily retiring rather than face tough competition and possible defeat. Owens specifically cited an unfriendly redistricting process in 1991 as a reason for abandoning his House seat and running for the Senate.

As a four-term member of Congress, Owens was no political novice. People knew Wayne Owens, and in large part, they liked him. He won consecutive elections in his urban Salt Lake County district by increasingly wide double-digit margins. Even in his previous Senate defeat in 1974, he nearly defeated the Republican candidate Jake Garn, losing the contest by just six percent. Several key issues hurt him in the 1992 race, including voters' perception of him as a political insider and the House bank scandal. Ultimately these issues and the Democratic Party label dragged him to defeat. In the context of a Utah growing more conservative and attuned to the Republican stance on social issues, Owens found little room to maneuver.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Nelson, *The Elections of 1992*, (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1993), 152; Michael Lyons and Peter Galderisi, "Incumbency reapportionment, and U.S. House Redistricting," *Political Research Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (December 1995); Bob Bernick Jr., "Owens maintains lead over all Republicans," *Deseret News*, 13 September 1991; Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1976 General Election Results*, (Salt Lake City, 1976).

The political environment in the 1992 election presented an opportunity for a political dark horse to make an impact. Bob Bennett attempted to fill that role. Several months after declaring his candidacy for Senate, polls gave Bennett a meager three percent of popular support. While unable to capitalize on any significant name recognition, Bennett utilized the situation to his advantage. With many voters feeling alienated from the political process, a lack of elected experience became an asset. Ironically, even though he spent years in Washington as a lobbyist, congressional aide, and Nixon administration appointee, Bennett managed to cast himself as an outsider, a businessman ready to shake up the Washington establishment.<sup>2</sup>

With Bennett lacking a voting record, the general election became a referendum on Owens and Congress. As a result, several key issues came to the forefront. In particular, the House banking scandal plagued Owens' campaign. On October 2, 1992, just one short month before the general election, the Justice Department publicly announced it would not investigate his case for lack of evidence of criminal wrongdoing. This had been the Owens' official campaign position from the start, but so much time had elapsed that many voters had already implicated him in the embarrassing event. Bennett effectively exploited the issue, pointing out that his campaign polling indicated 78 percent of Utahns associated Owens with the scandal. More importantly, it reminded voters of their distrust of the federal government and reinforced the anti-Washington message that resonated so well in the 1992 election cycle. If Owens had not been

---

<sup>2</sup> Twila Van Leer, "Ex-lawmaker and Gunnison businessman are elected to state Board of Education," *Deseret News*, 7 November 1990; Bob Bernick Jr., "Owens enjoys healthy edge in Senate race," *Deseret News*, 22 December 1991.

sufficiently tied to the Washington establishment before, the House banking scandal cemented the link in the public's mind.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, the Owens campaign attempted to remind voters of Bennett's ties to Washington primarily through his connections to the Watergate scandal two decades before. In 1992, speculation still swirled around the identity of Deep Throat, the scandal's chief informant to *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. Bennett had close ties to important players in the event and was suspected to be the anonymous Deep Throat. He owned a public relations firm that functioned as a front for the Central Intelligence Agency. One of his employees, Howard Hunt, organized the Watergate break-in. Bennett had an established relationship with Woodward, and he previously held a prominent position with the Nixon Administration. The former president allegedly suggested that Bennett could be the unknown informant. Only years later would Deep Throat's true identity be unveiled as former FBI agent Mark Felt.<sup>4</sup>

From the moment Bennett announced his candidacy, his campaign understood that Watergate issue would come into play. More than a full year before the general election, a campaign consultant wrote to Bennett addressing this issue: "You have Watergate baggage which at the very least ties you into an 'old politics;' ....Unless you can generate an anti-Owens vote, make people forget your age and baggage, you will lose

---

<sup>3</sup> "Owens is Cleared in House Bank Scandal," *Deseret News*, 3 October 1992; Lee Davidson, "No Letter Yet Clearing Owens in Bank Scandal," *Deseret News*, 29 September 1992; Memorandum from Donald Devine, 23 September 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Lee Davidson, "Watergate saga changed the life of Bob Bennett," *Deseret News*, June 16, 2002. Bob Bernick Jr., "Utahns buck national trend, keep change to a minimum," *Deseret News*, November 4, 1992; Lisa Riley Roche, "Bennett Long Denied He Was Source," *Deseret News*, 1 June 2005.

to Wayne in the general election.”<sup>5</sup> The Bennett campaign expected an attack regarding the Watergate connection with campaign memos circulating titled, “Watergate Inoculation.”<sup>6</sup> Rather than bring up the issue, Bennett chose to wait it out. No such formal attack took place in the GOP convention or primary, but in explaining possible reasons for a poor convention showing, one Bennett campaign consultant pointed to Watergate. “As much as I hate to admit it, Republican delegates are a suspicious lot, and just the talk about Watergate unsettled many of them.”<sup>7</sup> No polling confirmed this conclusion, but the prospect of Watergate attacks clearly unsettled the Bennett campaign from the very beginning.

Owens came into the general election as an underdog who needed to do something dramatic or lose the election convincingly. Owens held a place in Watergate’s history having voted to impeach Nixon while serving on the House Judiciary Committee. In reference to Bennett’s involvement in Watergate, Owens told a reporter: “He’s been an insider in the worst sense of the word for much longer than I’ve been an insider in the best sense of the word—as an elected representative.”<sup>8</sup> The painting of Bennett as an insider involved in Watergate was especially critical in a year when so many distrusted the Washington establishment. One Democratic strategist said at the time, “People are searching for someone who’s an outsider. Somebody who isn’t tied in to politics as usual. And here you have Bennett, who’s connected to the most damaging political scandal of the century.”<sup>9</sup> Owens produced a commercial on the subject saying, “His TV

---

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 30 October 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Jones to Bob Bennett, 22 July 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 1 July 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Anderson and Michael Binstein, “Candidate Sees Watergate Link as Asset,” *Washington Post*, 26 October 1992.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



commercials claim he's an outsider, but for nearly ten years, Bob Bennett was a Washington lobbyist."<sup>10</sup> Initially, the ads resonated among voters. Bennett recalled, "It was beginning to get some traction, and the polls started to narrow a little, ours as well as theirs."<sup>11</sup>

In a letter to Howard Baker, former senator and ranking member of the U.S Senate Watergate Committee, Bennett admitted that the Owens attacks hurt his campaign. Bennett implored Baker:

Should the Utah or Washington based media make contact with you it would be imperative to my success that you confirm without equivocation that the accusations made against me all came from individuals who were subsequently convicted of perjury, and that each and every investigation into those allegations fully and completely exonerated [sic] me of any direct or indirect involvement in the Watergate matter.<sup>12</sup>

Baker did as instructed, providing signed letters to the Bennett camp that were later shared with reporters. Even with this testimonial, the issue persisted for Bennett. The successful rebuttal to the argument came from Owens himself. During a radio interview early in the campaign, a reporter asked Owens what he thought about Bennett's involvement in the Watergate scandal. Owens responded, "No, I don't think Bob Bennett played a major role in Watergate." Months later when these allegations resurfaced, Bennett created a commercial where he refuted the claims of involvement in Watergate. At the end of the commercial, he pressed play on a tape recorder that repeated Owens' words three times, "No I don't think Bob Bennett played a major role in Watergate."

---

<sup>10</sup> "Take a Closer Look at Bob Bennett: 60 Second Radio Ad – Owens for Senate," Bennett collection.

<sup>11</sup> Bennett interview.

<sup>12</sup> Bob Bennett to Howard Baker, 21 October 1992, Bennett collection.

With Owens' voice refuting the attacks, the issue largely subsided. Bennett remained an outsider in the minds of many voters, a tremendous asset in the 1992 election.<sup>13</sup>

Environmental issues also made Owens politically vulnerable, particularly with voters in the rural counties who deplored his advocacy of expanded wilderness legislation. In setting forth a campaign strategy, the Congressman expected the issue to take center stage in a Cannon-Owens general election showdown. "This is perhaps the only state in the nation this year where environmental issues are pivotal," he said. "People want attention paid to the environment - to clean up the air, the second-worst in the country, to clean up and keep clean the water."<sup>14</sup> The unexpected Bennett victory surprised Owens. In the Owens campaign headquarters, a poster of Cannon's steel plant surrounded by pollution hung on the wall. A *Deseret News* reporter described Owens supporters publicly cheering for Cannon as results of the back-and-forth Republican primary streamed into the building on election night. If Cannon won, Owens' environmental record would remind voters of their concerns over poor air quality. After the election, Bennett discussed the election with Owens. "I was so sure that Joe Cannon was going to be my opponent. I had a whole campaign to go after Joe and Geneva," Bennett remembers Owens saying.<sup>15</sup> Bennett's victory eliminated much of Owens' political gain on the issue while still keeping all its liabilities.<sup>16</sup>

A campaign strategist outlined Bennett's position on the environment: "I think you need to be strong on clean air and water...while opposing wilderness. In other words, separate environmental and land-use issues. Environmentalism plays well along

---

<sup>13</sup> Dennis Lythgoe, "'Ads and Ends' on the Campaign Trail," *Deseret News*, 26 October 1992.

<sup>14</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., "4 Utah Senate Candidates Try to Stand Apart," *Deseret News*, 20 July 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Bennett interview.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph M. Bauman, "Environment Played Key Role in Owens' Victory" *Deseret News*, 11 September 1992.

the Wasatch Front, while multiple use on the public lands keeps the rural counties in your camp against Owens.”<sup>17</sup> While attempting to understand how Bennett performed so well in urban Utah County during the primary election, a campaign consultant pointed to the same issue:

In particular, the Republican primary vote in Utah County should be looked at. The even split there was a surprise to everyone, and there is a possibility that it was the result of environmentalist activism. If so, and if that activism can be mobilized against you, that is another part of a potential 50% coalition [for Owens].<sup>18</sup>

In reality, “environmental activism” in the county was attributable to anti-pollution sentiments directed at Cannon and his steel plant. Transferring that anger onto another Republican like Bennett largely failed.

Bennett showed support for the environment while distancing himself from many of the goals of the environmental community. In a campaign brochure, he outlined this position:

Bob says everyone is - or should be - an environmentalist, because the long-term effects of ignoring environmental problems can be devastating as the long-term effects of ignoring the deficit. However, he believes that the measuring rod we should use in deciding which proposals to support is whether or not they benefit people, as well as plants and animals.<sup>19</sup>

Bennett attempted to claim the mantle of environmental steward in the GOP primary. Now, facing an environmentalist, Bennett tried to reverse course and argue against the broader goals of the environmental movement. These campaign documents highlight the line that the Bennett campaign tried to walk between job creation and environmental responsibility.

---

<sup>17</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 10 September 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “Questions Frequently Asked About U.S. Senate Candidate Bob Bennett,” Campaign Advertisement of Bob Bennett, Bennett collection.

Rather than run from the issue, Owens fully embraced the environment, even if it cost him dearly in rural areas. “A radical environmentalist I am...I don’t think I could get elected dog catcher in Southern Utah,” Owens said, a quote quickly repeated by Republicans.<sup>20</sup> In his 1984 gubernatorial race, Owens beat his Republican challenger in four rural counties while splitting the vote in another five. The 1992 race was a different story. Despite persistent opposition, Owens did not shy away from his support of expanded wilderness legislation. “Most of the state is catching up with me on environmental issues,” he said at the time.<sup>21</sup> The final vote tally between the candidates indicated that Utah voters never caught his vision.

To help support his environmental arguments, Owens made a direct appeal to religion in a campaign mailer regarding wilderness. Candidates can craft a message that will resonate with a Mormon audience by utilizing a well-placed word or cue. In defense of environmental legislation, Owens pointed out that many Utahns supported wilderness, the sticking point was how much. A Bureau of Land Management study recommended the designation of 1.9 million acres as wilderness, while environmentalists wanted a much larger figure. Owens pushed a bill that would designate five million acres of the state to wilderness. In response to outraged Utahns, Owens briefly turned to Mormon practice to defend his position. He said, “About ten percent of Utah’s land would be preserved as wilderness if [my bill] is passed, a tithe to our future and to our children who will never have to wonder what sort of grandeur we once lived with in Utah.”<sup>22</sup> This did not impress Mormons in the Utah backcountry. Following the election, Owens offered

---

<sup>20</sup> John Keahey, “Owens Will Resist Efforts to Redraw 2<sup>nd</sup> District,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 20 November 1990.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Rolly, “Owens: Democrats’ Shining Knight?” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 January 1992.

<sup>22</sup> “Utah Outdoors,” Wayne Owens Newsletter, 6 September 1989. Utah Republican State Central Committee – State Files, Officeholders – Congressman Wayne Owens, JWML.

an explanation: “Our [Mormon] doctrine is enormously progressive toward the environment, but our cultural interpretation has not followed suit. Our theology has not translated politically into a powerful environmental ethic.”<sup>23</sup>

Reference to religion in Utah came with risks. When Bennett had two high-profile Democrats publicly endorse his candidacy over Owens, a draft copy of the newspaper advertisement mentioned their Mormon religious affiliation. A letter from one of the two asked that Bennett delete the Mormon references. His reasoning: “My experience is that explicit reference to L.D.S. service in political campaigns can backfire.”<sup>24</sup> When used overtly, religious references can often turn voters away from a particular candidate.

If focused on the environment, Owens was well aware of Mormon social conservatism. Sensitive to voters’ concerns, he bucked the national party on moral issues. Still, he miscalculated as a campaign fundraising brochure severely damaged him with voters. Intended for an out-of-state audience, the brochure proudly set forth the liberal voting agenda of the congressman, particularly on social issues. A Bennett staffer stumbled upon the Owens fundraising brochure with its title taken from a quote by Senator Orrin Hatch: “If you send Wayne Owens back there, every vote I cast is going to be canceled, virtually every vote.”<sup>25</sup> The brochure listed his support of abortion, gun control, national defense cuts, and gay rights. Bennett quickly attacked Owens, making 100,000 copies of the brochure and distributing them across the state. The appearance of dishonesty hurt Owens, especially as he seemingly offered two contradictory messages to

---

<sup>23</sup> “Utah Quotes,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 June 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel L. Berman to Bob Bennett, 19 October 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>25</sup> “If you send Wayne Owens back there, every vote I cast is going to be canceled, virtually every vote,” Campaign Advertisement of Bob Bennett, Bennett collection.

different audiences. Worse, his self-portrayal as a social liberal hurt him in the morally conservative state.

Owens drew support from unions, but Utah's labor movement had little influence in political contests. In 1955, the state passed strict right-to-work laws that significantly hampered the labor movement. In addition, the LDS Church publicly supported national right-to-work legislation in 1965, further stigmatizing unions in the state. One Bennett campaign memo stated, "We can expect Owens, with his labor union support, to have an effective phone bank turnout effort."<sup>26</sup> Beyond this, Bennett displayed little concern for the organizing power of unions. In debate preparations, Bennett staffers urged him to remind voters of his opponent's connection to organized labor. Quoting from a National Right to Work Newsletter's talking points: "Owens has been one of Big Labor's most reliable water carriers in Congress."<sup>27</sup> A weak labor movement and strong anti-union sentiment doubly harmed Owens.<sup>28</sup>

Traditionally, Owens relied upon his personal strengths and character to carry him in an otherwise unfriendly political environment. "Utahns don't throw people out of office who they like and have confidence in," Owens said.<sup>29</sup> Others remember his affable personality. "He was a very charming man," Jones recalled. "He had a great way of speaking that was disarming, self-deprecating, humorous and people liked him, even if they didn't like his politics, they liked him....His personality seemed to fit Utah pretty well."<sup>30</sup> As the race began, nonpartisan polling found that 22 percent of Republicans preferred the Democrat Owens in the contest. "Wayne always believed in his ability to

---

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 10 September 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Campaign memorandum to Bob Bennett, 24 October 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>28</sup> Rogers, 11-12.

<sup>29</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., "4 Utah Senate Candidates Try to Stand Apart," *Deseret News*, 20 July 1992.

<sup>30</sup> Jones interview.

sit down with somebody one-on-one and persuade them to support him,” Jones said.<sup>31</sup>

While this strategy worked in his district, and to a certain degree in his earlier statewide races, his likeable personality could not overcome the significant party identification gap that existed between Democrats and Republicans.<sup>32</sup>

Besides his Republican Party identification, Bennett’s greatest strength in the campaign was voters’ perceptions of him as a political outsider. A campaign memo offered a reason for Owens’ predicament. “In some respects it is inevitable that a sitting Member of Congress becomes part of the Washington Establishment. Only a very few escape the trap.”<sup>33</sup> Bennett happily accepted this, making sure voters identified Owens with an unpopular Congress. A Bennett campaign memo strategized: “The issue is how to remind the voters of Owens’ negatives without causing a real backlash of sympathy for Owens.” The memo continued:

THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION IS TO IDENTIFY OWENS WITH THE THINGS ABOUT CONGRESS AS A WHOLE THAT THE VOTERS SO INTENSELY DISLIKE. IN DOING THAT YOU ACTUALLY CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE CONGRESS AS A WHOLE, AND NOT OWENS PERSONALLY.<sup>34</sup>

Bennett had his personal punching bag in Congress, attacking it (and by proxy his opponent) without risking voter backlash.

In addition to party identity, Bennett benefitted from important demographic changes in the state. Following national trends, the 1980s saw a major shift in population away from urban centers to booming suburban communities. Such suburbs in Davis and

---

<sup>31</sup> Jones interview.

<sup>32</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., “Owens, Cannon Open Wide Leads,” *Deseret News*, 14 March 1992; Quin Monson and Thad Hall, “Elections in Utah: A Perspective with Data” (presentation, Utah Governor’s Commission on Election Reform, Salt Lake City, UT, April 2009). This presentation showed that in 1992 Utahns identified themselves with the GOP by a 53-33 margin over Democrats.

<sup>33</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, no date, Bennett collection.

<sup>34</sup> Campaign memorandum to Bob Bennett, 24 October 1992.

Salt Lake Counties grew by 28 and 17 percent respectively in the 1980s. Utah suburbs, unlike its urban cores, became Republican strongholds. Salt Lake City suburbs like Bountiful, Layton, and Centerville disproportionately attracted white men and women who affiliated with the Mormon Church. Meanwhile, Democratic areas in urban centers lost population or were stagnant. Salt Lake City's white, non-Hispanic population dropped an estimated eight percent in the twenty years from 1970-1990. Devoted religiously and situated in large families, these Utahns rallied to conservatives, who preached traditional values and railed against feminists, gays, and liberals. On election day, they voted a straight Republican ticket. The census tracked the growth of these burgeoning suburbs. So, too, did savvy politicians. Democrats were not only on the defensive ideologically, the numbers were also against them.<sup>35</sup>

Suburban Davis County overwhelmingly supported Bennett in the 1992 race with a nearly two-to-one margin. Owens lost the county during his first Senate race in 1974, but by a smaller margin. More importantly, the total number of voters in the county increased 136 percent during those 18 years. While Owens lost the U.S. Senate race by approximately 25,000 votes in 1974, he lost Davis County alone by 21,000 votes in the 1992 contest. Figure 2 shows the dramatic increase in population of Davis County, one of Salt Lake's largest suburban areas, compared with the city's decline. The bulk of support for Utah Democrats came from Salt Lake City and the state's other urban centers. The move since the early 1970s to the Republican Party is in direct relationship to the rise

---

<sup>35</sup> *General Population Characteristics: Utah, 1970*, U.S. Census Bureau (Washington, DC); *General Population Characteristics: Utah, 1990*, U.S. Census Bureau (Washington, DC); Joel Campbell, "Suburbs boom as S.L. population sags," *Deseret News*, January 24, 1991.



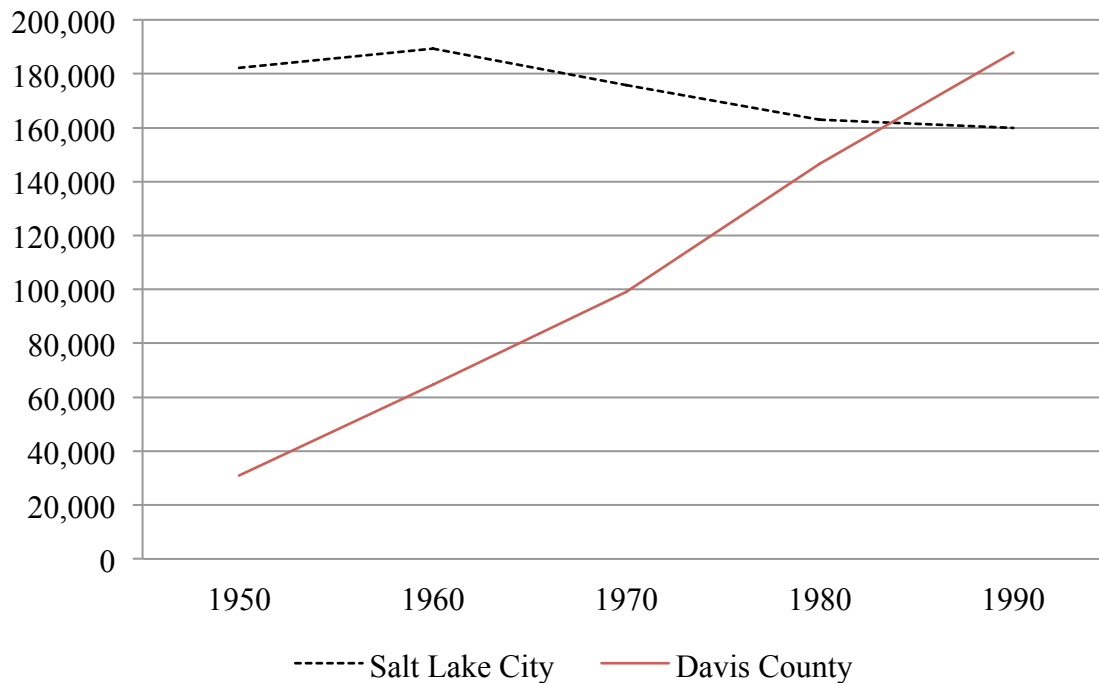


Figure 2. Population by Decade

of suburban communities.<sup>36</sup>

In the final vote tally, Bennett defeated Owens, 420,069 to 301,228, a 16 percent margin of victory. Rural counties overwhelmingly sided with Bennett. Even Garfield County, Owen's rural home, delivered a convincing 60 percent victory for Bennett. Suburban areas delivered a hard blow to Owens. Salt Lake County, a mix of urban and suburban precincts, narrowly went to Bennett. In all, Bennett won all but three of the state's 29 counties. Owens' third try at a statewide race ended more disastrously than ever. Each candidate brought vulnerabilities to the election, but more importantly, the

<sup>36</sup> Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1992 General Election Results*; Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1976 General Election Results*. The increase in voter participation is in part attributable to the increased population coupled with the higher voter turnout in a presidential election year. Similar results could not be ascertained for individual cities as the lieutenant governor's office only collects election returns by precinct and county.

Democratic label was too burdensome to overcome for Owens in an increasingly conservative Utah.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Owens defeated Bennett in Carbon, Summit, and Tooele Counties, Democratic-leaning areas of the state.

## RISE OF CONSERVATISM AND FALL OF LIBERALISM

The career of Wayne Owens offers much insight into Utah's changing political landscape. In the 11 major elections held between 1972 to 1992, Owens was a candidate in seven of them (four times for the House of Representative, twice for Senate, and once for governor). Of particular usefulness are his three unsuccessful runs at statewide office. In each successive campaign, Owens drew a smaller share of the vote. He narrowly lost to Senator Jake Garn by six percent in 1974, the 1984 gubernatorial race by 12 percent, and the 1992 Senate contest by 16 percent. In 1972 during his first run for Congress, Democrats held the governorship, majorities in both houses of the state legislature, and every congressional seat except one U.S. Senate seat. A short 20 years later, Republicans controlled both state legislative bodies, both Senate seats, and one of the state's three congressional seats. One political commentator said it best: "When [Owens is] up, the party soars. When he crashes, the party becomes catatonic. For the past two decades, he's been the party's litmus test."<sup>1</sup> The sad reality for Utah Democrats is that over time the crashes became more frequent and their toll more severe.<sup>2</sup>

A profound shift occurred in Utah politics in the last decades of the twentieth century as conservative Republican voters increased significantly to outnumber Democrats. Key to this was a broad ranging reaction to cultural and social change

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Rolly, "Owens: Democrat's Shining Knight?" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 January 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Bob Bernick Jr., "1992 Was Year of Major Change on the Political Scene in Utah," *Deseret News*, 1 January 1993.

hatched in the 1960s and early 1970s. Conservatives preached what commentators have called the “social issue” to mobilize a coalition of groups in opposition to liberalism and the Democratic Party. Denounced as the party of abortion, gay rights, and feminism, Democrats lost ground and the balance of power shifted right and to the Republican Party. In tune with Utah’s Mormon majority, conservatives championed the traditional family, life, and national security. Democratic erosion accelerated as the messages of Mormon leaders resonated with Republican politicians. For many Mormons, it was impossible to be a Democrat and a faithful Mormon simultaneously.

Beyond the ideological, Democratic misfortune was apparent in the electoral math. The 1992 Senate election provides an ideal moment to analyze this. Republican primary voters outnumbered Democrats 263,639 to 120,746, more than a two-to-one advantage for the GOP. Most telling is that the losing Republican candidate Joe Cannon received more votes than the two Democratic candidates combined. As more voters identified as Republicans, Democratic electoral chances disappeared.<sup>3</sup>

The Republicans looked to the suburbs as their heartland and turned their backs on the citizens of the urban centers of Utah. There was little risk to this strategy. The 1990 census revealed significant development in suburban communities coupled with stagnation in the state’s urban cities. In combination with the rural counties, the rapidly growing suburban precincts were brimming with white Mormons living in traditional families. Utah’s suburban growth helped solidify conservative gains in the state. Demographic variables only enhanced ideological trends.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1992 Primary Election Results*.

<sup>4</sup> For additional information on suburban growth, see the following works. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); *The New*

Owens and other Utah Democrats hoping to win a statewide race realized that putting together a winning coalition had become nearly impossible. An interoffice memo from the Bennett campaign explains this political reality:

It is just not possible for [Owens] to put together a coalition totalling [sic] 50%, barring some major goof on our part. The base Democrat vote in the State is roughly 35%. In 1974, Owens came with [sic] 5,000 votes of Jake Garn running statewide, but in those days the Democratic Party was only beginning its suicide, and the base vote was substantially higher. Assuming Owens gets all of the 35% (which he won't), he needs to find another 15%. Republican environmentalists? At most 5%. Pro-choice Republican women? At most 2%. He might get to 40%, by some legerdemain to 45%, but that's the top.<sup>5</sup>

The prognostication proved accurate as Owens garnered 40 percent in the general election. Since that time, no Democrat has earned more than 33 percent of the popular vote in a U.S. Senate election in the state.

With such a scenario, the entire emphasis of a GOP campaign is focused on winning the Republican nomination. While most campaigns ramp up staff following a primary election, a Bennett consultant suggested the opposite strategy: "We should be able to cut the present staff by 50%."<sup>6</sup> After Bennett won the primary, a senior staff member circulated a memo encapsulating this point. "Your campaign team has done a solid job, and there is every reason to think that they will be able to continue the effort through the general election. As [the campaign manager] says, it's on auto-pilot."<sup>7</sup> Without any significant competition from the Democrat Party, most Republicans simply coast to the finish line.

---

*Suburban History*, ed. by Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue (University of Chicago, 2006); Margaret Marsh, *Suburban Lives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 10 September 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum from John Harmer, 8 September 1992, Bennett collection.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum from Gordon Jones, 10 September 1992.

The Bennett advertising strategy, so critical to his success in the Republican primary, changed focus heading into the general election. A campaign memo revealed this shift in priorities:

Your media campaign should essentially ignore Owens. It should continue the 'change' and 'reform Congress' themes, but in my opinion you should soften your image, using footage of you strolling around the yard in a sweater, walking your grandson, with your own voice-over: 'This is why I want to change Congress, reform the process, limit terms, etc.' That kind of stuff. Footage of you interacting with different kinds of people will blur some of the hard edges people perceive on you now.<sup>8</sup>

Going from an aggressive campaign strategy to wearing a sweater and walking around the yard with a grandchild is a tectonic shift in advertising strategy in just a few short weeks. Democrats shared this reality. "As I look back on that election, I had a real clear feeling as early as March that this was not going to go well," Owens' campaign manager recalled. "I felt like we could probably win the nomination, but somebody was going to have to screw up really badly for us to win."<sup>9</sup> These considerations underscore the political vulnerability of Democrats, especially in an increasingly conservative Utah.

Recognizing this problem, Owens distanced himself from the Democratic label. In a campaign press release, he said, "Bob Bennett has purposely overlooked the fact that I am a different kind of Democrat."<sup>10</sup> His chief of staff echoed this problem. "There was a perception that he was too liberal to win a statewide race," she recalled.<sup>11</sup> Recognizing the liability of the Democratic label, Owens attempted to show his independence of the national party, particularly on issues unpopular with the state electorate. "'The Wayne Owens of '72 and '74 was more of an ideological purist,' he conceded. 'The Wayne

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Jones interview.

<sup>10</sup> "Owens Defends Senator Garn's Record of Fiscal Responsibility." Campaign Advertisement for Wayne Owens, Bennett collection.

<sup>11</sup> Christensen interview.

Owens of '86 is more practical. I know there's a need to balance budgets and to balance environmental concerns.'"<sup>12</sup> Owens recognized that a Democrat in denial was the only palatable option for many Utah voters.

The 1992 election was the last stand of Wayne Owens and the Democrats in U.S. Senate races in Utah. Owens never again ran for office. Democratic Senate candidates have fallen by an average of 30 percent of the vote since the 1992 election with this particular race revealing the power of two tidal forces. In the 1960s and 1970s, Utahns made an ideological shift to the right around the social issues of family, God, and guns and against gays, abortion, and women's rights. By 1992, a conservative consensus had been reached on these issues with voters overwhelmingly siding with the GOP. Republican candidates did not question this common wisdom, vouching for their conservative credentials in the primary campaign. In addition to this ideological shift, a suburbanization of electoral power occurred as racially and religiously homogenous communities voted as blocs for Republican conservatives. This demographic transformation shattered traditional voting trends with conservatives the overwhelming beneficiaries. Without a major demographic shift or a national crisis that shatters party identities and loyalties, Democrats will have little hope for success and Republicans little fear of failure.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> "Wayne Owens," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 26 October 1986.

<sup>13</sup> From 1992 to the present, the following shows general election results for U.S. Senate elections in Utah. 1994: (R) Hatch-69 percent, (D) Pat Shea-28 percent. 1998: (R) Bennett-64, (D) Scott Leckman-33 percent. 2000: (R) Hatch-66 percent, (D) Scott Howell-31 percent. 2004: (R) Bennett-69, (D) Van Dam-29 percent. 2006: (R) Hatch-61 percent, (D) Ashdown-30 percent. 2010: (R) Lee-62 percent, (D) Granato-33 percent

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### **Manuscript Collections**

Bennett, Robert F., Papers. Private collection. Salt Lake City, Utah.

Bennett, Robert F., Papers. Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

Owens, Wayne, Papers. Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

Utah State Democratic Committee, Papers. Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

Utah State Republican Central Committee, Papers. Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

Williams, J.D., Papers. Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

### **Newspapers**

*Deseret News*

*New York Times*

*Salt Lake Tribune*

*Utah County Journal*

### **Interviews**

Bob Bennett. Interview by author, 21 April 2011, Salt Lake City.

Christensen, Kay. Interview by author, 15 April 2011, telephone.



Glade, Kevin. Interview by author, 18 April 2011, telephone.

Hopkins, Greg. Interview by author, 8 April 2011, Salt Lake City.

Jones, Dave. Interview by author, 20 April 2011, Salt Lake City.

Shepherd, Larry. Interview by author, 4 April 2011, Salt Lake City.

### **Government Records**

U.S. Congress. Senate. 105<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1998.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *General Population Characteristics: Utah, 1970*.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.. *General Population Characteristics: Utah, 1990*.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *Income and Poverty Status in 1989*.

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *Urban and Rural Population: 1900 to 1990*

Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1976 General Election Results*, (Salt Lake City, 1976).

Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1992 General Election Results*, (Salt Lake City, 1992).

Utah Office of the Lieutenant Governor, *1992 Primary Election Results*, (Salt Lake City, 1992).

### **Books, Theses, and Other Articles**

Abramson, Paul R. and John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde. *Change and Continuity in the 1992 Elections*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc.

Alexander, Thomas G. *Utah: The Right Place*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2003.

Ceaser, James and Andrew Busch. *Upside Down and Inside Out: the 1992 Elections and American Politics*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993.

Hall, Thad, Quin Monson. "Elections in Utah: A Perspective with Data." Paper

- presented to the Utah Governor's Commission on Election Reform, Salt Lake City, UT, April 2009.
- Haymond, Jay M. "Douglas Wayne Owens," in *Utah History Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Kent Powell. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994.
- Heuston, Kelley Page. "Homosexuality and the Fight for Legal Rights in Utah." Master's thesis, University of Utah, 2005.
- Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Jonas, Frank H. "Utah: The Different State." In *Politics in the American West*, ed. Frank H. Jonas, 326-379. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1969.
- Kruse, Kevin M. and Thomas J. Sugrue, eds. *The New Suburban History*. University of Chicago, 2006.
- Lehrer, Jim. "Outgoing Sens. Bayh, Bennett: Political Extremes Are Out of Touch." PBS, December 9, 2010, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/july-dec10/compromise\\_12-09.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/july-dec10/compromise_12-09.html).
- Lyons, Michael and Peter Galderisi. "Incumbency reapportionment, and U.S. House Redistricting," *Political Research Quarterly* 48, no. 4. December 1995.
- Marsh, Margaret. *Suburban Lives*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990.
- May, Dean L. *Utah: A People's History*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987.
- Nelson, Michael. *The Elections of 1992*. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1993.
- Newport, Frank. "Mormons Most Conservative Major Religious Group in the U.S.," *Gallup*, January 11, 2010, Accessed February 23, 2011, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/125021/mormons-conservative-major-religion-group.aspx>.
- Perry, Charles, "Let He Who Is Without Sin Cast the First Orange: Anita Bryant and the Making of a Gay Rights Movement in Salt Lake City." Master's thesis, University of Utah, 2008.
- Rogers, Jay Logan. "Utah's Right Turn: Republican Ascendancy and the 1976 U.S. Senate Race." Master's thesis, University of Utah, 2008.
- Seaman, James. "Critical Campaign: Republicans, Democrats, and the 1964 Election in Utah." Master's thesis, University of Utah, 2007.
- Schulman, Bruce J. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and*

*Politics*. New York: The Free Press, 2001.

Scruggs, H.E. "Bud, David Magleby. "Delegates as Trustees: A Study of the 1992 Utah Neighborhood Party Caucuses." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Pasadena, CA, March 18-20, 1993.

Sillito, John and Bill Slaughter, "An Interview with Wayne Owens." *Sunstone* 5, no. 4. July 1980.